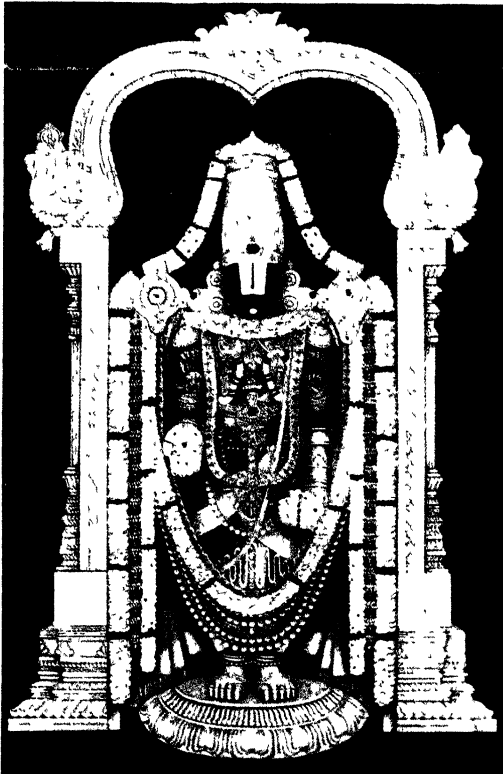


108 VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS

VOLUME SIX

Miss M.S. Ramesh, I.A.S., (Retd).



TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS

TIRUPATI

1998

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VOLUME SIX

Miss M.S. RAMESH, I.A.S. (Retd.)



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M.K.R. VINAYAK, I.A.S.
Executive Officer
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108 Vaishnavite Divya Desams - VI

by

Ms. M.S. Ramesh

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**Dedicated
To my Parents
Smt. Padmavathy Srirama Iyengar
and
Prof. Srirama Iyengar**

SRI SWAMIJI'S SRI MUKHAM

At a time when a majority of public are leaning towards ways suited to their own tastes neglecting vedic rites, temples and adorations, the attentive attempt of Kum. Ramesh MS. I.A.S. by pening volumes on the Divya desas-holy places of vaishnavas (greatly praised by Alwars who were the replicas of devotion) gives us great joy and wonder.

It is only the lucky that develop faith in God. The devotion in the Lord of Lakshmi comes to those who for several thousands of births adore devas (Demi gods). Then alone can one know the greatness of idol worship. At least the idol never asks one 'why worship has not been offered to Him.' A very broadmind is needed to believe deity as the divine form of Almighty who is the cause of the universe.

We may defend ourselves with a logic that the all pervasive Lord contained in each and every atom of the Universe and likeness is found in the sanctified deity bearing a form and a name. We accept Spiritual Texts as authority and observe the ways mentioned in them. They are known as the Agamas.

There are temples in many places but a few only got acceptance of 'Sistas' the highly purified spiritual souls, as Divyadesas. Divya desas are famous because the Bhagavan had manifested to devotees of high order or in the places frequently visited by alwars or the ones favoured by them. In some places the deities had been consecrated by sages. Divyadesas, however, are famous because of the visits of devotees the worldover.

The holy places are 108 Sung by Alwars of which 106 are on our earth. They always sang the praises of the Lord in different ways. Palakdali and Paramapadam are above our imagination. Alwars songs have become 'Divya prabandhas' or

Treatises Divine depicting the pilgrim centres and the grandeur of the presiding deities. According to Agamas God comes onto the earth and gets installed by Rishis and Alvars as deities. Praised by them, the Divine descends even at discomfort to Him. In order, however, to avoid pains to the Godhead, elders ever offer best wishes to the archamurti or the deity being worshipped.

Some doubt why at all God who created the universe had to become a deity? Can't he save this world from above? In answer to the requests made to Him He took idol form for making Himself available to the ardent devotees for accepting their worships. The second benefit of the paramatma's act is to protect the world. Such kind of devotees want nothing from the Lord. They only want to see and adore Him always.

Our tradition holds that if God manifests in mobile form. He shall go back to look to multifold jobs of the Universe. So in order to ever appear before the eyes of the devotees the Lord became immobile idol, the deity. So the idol in the temple is regarded as 'adorable incarnation' of God. It is termed as archavataram.

'Soulabhyam' or 'easy accessibility' is one of the endless beneficent and auspicious qualities of the Lord. Paramatman has no personal needs and is ever satisfied and free in all aspects, yet He allows Himself to be in the custody of the priests. This is the quality of the Lord's availability in the easiest way. If some object falls into a well it must be drawn out by a device called anchor. it is possible only when the anchor goes to the bottom of the well and holds the object by connecting its hooks to it. Jeevas condition in the mundane world is similar. They are uplifted by the Lord in the like manner, He fulfils the wishes of jivas and wins their love and favour. Agamas or sciences of temples depict the deity as a form attracting jivas towards it

by its loveliness, eye-catching decorations, festivities and divine food called 'Prasadam'. Deserted hearts also find solace and shelter at the deity's feet.

Those who have the heart to understand praise idol worship as wholesome and others dismiss it as useless.

I am reminded of the conversation between Sri Sri Sri Tridandi Srimannarayana Ramanuja Peddha Jeeyar Swami and Sri E.V. Ramaswami Naikar when they met in Tiruchi in 1969.

EVR showed a cockroach on the Pillayer idol in his house. "If God cannot throw away the visible insect crawling on His body, how can He throw away the sins of devotees clinging unseen to the mind? As it is impossible I decided that idol worship is useless and became an atheist," he said.

Swamiji smiled and said: "Don't we see grandfathers feeling overjoyed on seeing grandchildren and great grandchildren? They embrace them and put them right on their heads and do not abuse them or throw them away if they excrete stool or urinate on their bodies. God's love for us is greater than ours. His family is bigger than ours. Ours is a family of few members. The entire creation is His family. That is why when cockroach is playing on His body, He thinks his grand children and great grand children are playing and never throws them away." It seems he felt happy on hearing this explanation.

There is a sloka in 'Srimadbhagavata', "Preatimasu Aprabuddhanam", idol worship is for the simpletons and not for the 'Prabuddhas' who are knowledgeable. Some modern people have entertained wrong ideas that idol worship is the first step and meditation (without doing anything else) is the final step. 'Aprabuddhas' are those whose eyes do not see whether the outwardly visible forms of money, metal, wood, paper or loam, or Whatever is outside the idol. They give importance to

the 'Paramatma tatwa' inside and worship with complete faith. They are great 'Jnanis' who do not desire any form other than the 'Archamurti'. Hanuma in Sri Ramayana belongs to this category of Jnanis. Similarly an Alwar called 'Tiruppan' also belongs to this category.

The Alwars belong to this category. After giving devotional services to Lord Sri Ranganath they held the faith that the eyes which enjoyed the picturesqueness and perfection of that Lord, dislike to see all other forms. (Unnai kanda kangal mattonninai kkanave). When the divinity Himself appears as deity before our eyes 'Is n't it a folly to go for other things? So Alwars are satisfied with the presence of deities as Archamurtis.

A santimantra of Veda (Poorname vavasishyate) is authority on the overall perfectness of deities as the right channel for spiritual progress. Way other than this is like expecting water from colouds when it is readily available at hand.

History has it that Lord Sri Ranganath is the first deity to have descended onto the earth. Yet Lord Venkateswara has attained recognition as the foremost Deity and as Godhead on the earth. He is worshipped by different Divine names like Ventachalapati, Sri Venkatesa etc., Sri Srinivasa is the only Lord with prettiness in all details and Tirupati is famed as the unique pilgrim centre having enormous earmings. None other than Lord Venkateswara enjoys the splendour among the 106 Divya Desas. Personal experiences of devotees by alleviation of their grievances and elevation to spiritual world are indicators of the rare powers of the Lord.

Tamil terms "kata" represent sinheaps of past births and 'Vem' dispeller or burner. It means 'Dispeller of all sins. Some ways or other demi gods too can remove sins. But the firm bonds of the Karma are broken by Lord Srinivasa alone. Hence

the nomenclature 'Venkateswara'. 'Ishwar' means one who is the custodian and controller. All Devas are beholden to only one Lord who is the custodian and controller. All Devas behave at the orders of the Lord by his mere looks. So Lord Srinivasa became Lord Venkateswara. The Hill 'venkatachalam' where He stays itself cleanses the sins of the devotees. This was stated by the Alwars. It is also called 'Tiruvengadam' and the Lord is addressed as TIRUVENGADAMUDAIYAN.

Holy places or pilgrim centres assume popularity and eminence when some persons work for them and serve with commitment. In the past, people found leisure and visited temples with great attention and devotion in spite of non-availability of transport facilities. People used to move all over the country and visited places of spiritual eminence. Paradoxically, now people stopped pilgrimage although world became too small with latest transport modes. Lack of proper knowledge about the Divyadesas and love of earning money are reasons for this lapse. Though money-earning is a great attainment, it should not become a handicap to spiritual progress. Pilgrimage (visits to holy places) must be given top priority. Spread of English education has adversely affected devotional literature mainly because most of it was written in Sanskrit, Telugu and Tamil. To overcome this problem at the right time, Kum. Ramesh has published a compendium on the splendour of the 108 Divyadesas in a simple and lucid English. This gives us satisfaction. The volume is a guide to pilgrims. It contains important addresses, routes, history, testaments of yore etc. together with worthseeing places and mainly the pasuras sung by Alwars in praise of the Divyadesas. A short notes on them has also been given by her.

A thing which needs special mention among the contents is the description of Lord Venkateswara which has been made in proportion to His stature and is indicative of the writer's dearly regard towards the Lord of Seven Hills. Besides transliteration

of Alwar's pasurams into English, inclusion of ordinary, extraordinary and exclusive meanings make the volume authoritative.

Some modernists spread, doubts among public asking the Gender of Lord Srinivasa of Tirupati. 'Is he Male or Female?' 'or What kind of person?' Srimadbhagavadgita has answers to them. It reveals Him as Sri Mahavishnu who dons conch, discus, mace etc., with countless names. Devas exist in his form Universal. Kshetra mahatyam almost the 12 out of 18 puranas mentioned the famous story of Lord Srinivasa. The uncontextual remarks passed by some people due to half-knowledge are unimportant. Among the 108 Divyadesas the lively descriptions made by Kum. Ramesh with greater care and devotion deserves benedictions by Padmavati Lakshmi Ammavaru who is the winner of Lord Srinivasa's Heart's Empire.

We proffer our blessings profusely for the spread of the Lord's splendour by means of this rare work. We hope her books will be utilised by the seekers who believe in the great Almighty.

sd/- Sri Shriman Narayana Jeer Swamiji.

PREFACE

This book is the sixth volume in the series of seven programmed by me for presenting the material on the 108 Vaishnavite Divya Desas. As explained in detail in the preface to Volume Five, the three divya desas covered in this Volume Six., Ahobalam, Vaikunta and Ksheerabdhi were originally meant to be covered in Volume Five itself. But as the material became too bulky, I decided to have one volume dealing exclusively with Tirupati and carried over these three divya desas to Volume Six. The original program was to cover the Malai Nadu Tirupathis (i.e. the divya desas in Kerala) in Volume Six and the divya desas in North India in Volume Seven. That has been slightly altered and I now propose to cover all the divya desas in Kerala and North India in the last volume viz., Volume Seven.

As is well known, Vaikunta and Ksheerabdhi are the two divya desas which are not in this world. As such, we cannot have the experience of visiting those divya desas with this mortal body. But the mukthathmas and the acharyas and alvars with their gnana drushti described Vaikunta as well as Ksheerabdhi in their writings. Thus, the absence of the first hand information to be gained by being able to visit Vaikunta and Ksheerabdhi is made up by presenting a pen picture of these two divya desas as gleamed from the writings of the acharyas etc. I have therefore adopted the method of presenting the description of Vaikunta as given by Nammalvar in his pasurams, by Sri Pillai Lokacharya in his book "Archiradhi gadhi" and from the information given by Sri Kurattalvan in his "Vaikuntha sthavam" and by Shri Ramanuja in his Vaikunta Gadyam. Similarly, while presenting the material on Ksheerabdhi, I have borrowed the words used by the alvars in their pasurams and from the material available in Lakshmi Tantra.

While dealing with Ahobala Kshetra in this volume, I have given the meaning for all the ten mangalasassana pasurams

composed by Thirumangai Alvar on Ahobalam as it gives a very graphic picture of the hostile hill terrain in that divya desa.

As this volume deals with only three divya desas, it is a very small book. But yet I felt that it deserved to be presented seperately and not along with the divya desas in Kerala and North India. I further felt that as this volume is only a continuation of Voluma Five where I had a general chapter on Prapatti, I need not present the usual general topic on Vaishnavism. In Volume Seven, I propose to conclude the series with a general chapter on the Divine Lotus Feet of the Lord which is the ultimate goal aspired by all believers.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not thank a few atleast amongst the many who helped in bringing out this volume. I wish to place on record my thanks to all the members of my family who provided enormous support and encouraged me in completing this work. My thanks are also due to my teachers Sri Ubhaya Vedantha Pillai Lokam Sthala Sayanathuraivar Swamigal, Prof. Ananthan and Prof. Narasimachari. My grateful thanks are also due to the staff in the T.T.D. Press, viz., Sri Mohan Rao, Manager, T.T.D. Press, and Sri Govindarajulu, Assistant Manager, T.T.D. Press who provided excellent technical support in bringing out this volume in a neat manner. My thanks are also due to Sri K. Ramji who provided wonderful, excellent secretarial support.

I do hope that the material as presented in this volume will hold the interest of the readers.

Om Namo Narayana

* * *

108 VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS

VOLUME - VI

AHOBALAM

Out of the one hundred and eight divya desas, two are in Andhra Pradesh. They are Tirumala and Ahobalam. In this chapter, I propose to relate the sthalapurana of Ahobalam along with certain interesting epigraphical records available in that temple. In conclusion all pasurams (mangalasasanam) sung by Thirumangai Alvar in praise of the Lord here are explained.

Ahobalam is a famous Narasimha kshetra. Narasimha avatara is the only avatara where Lord's immanence and transcendence show at the same time. There is no other avatara in which we see simultaneously two incompatible situations being projected at the same time through the same organ. It is only in Narasimhavatara that Perumal showed through the kataksha of His eyes grace and beauty for the child devotee Prahladha and fury and terror for the asura Hiranyakasipu. Vedantha Desika said that this Aganitha gatana samarthyas displayed by the Perumal ensured that the sweet and balmy grace and terrific frightening fury shot out at the same time, from the same organ viz. the eye of the Perumal. Vedanta Desika goes one step further and says that even today the whole world is en-ciente with the form of Narasimha, as Narasimha came out only out of a particular pillar which Hiranyakasipu kicked in his demonic frenzy. The rest of the three worlds, Desika says, is still pregnant with Narasimha and He will come out only when the occasion arises and when somebody like the child Prahladha calls Him in all sincerity and faith. God will always appear for the protection of the righteous (sadhu parithranam). The extinction of the wicked (dushkrita vinasam) is only a secondary object for Him. This thought of Desika that Narasimha is still to be seen, though hidden from our eyes, in the various objects in this world, is expressed by Nammalwar also when he

utters the words "Engum Nadi nadi Narasingavendru". Vishnu Sahasranama refers to God as "Narasimha vapu sriman". It means that Perumal is one who has the form of Narasimha and is beautiful. Tirumazhisai Alvar also refers to Narasimha as "Azhagian thanae, arivuruvam thanae" i.e. He partakes of the form of a lion and He is beautiful. Andal in Tiruppavai as Goda dreamt of her wedding. She relates the scene to her companions and there she refers twice to the Narasimha rupa of God viz. once when she refers to His entering the marriage pandal and next when Perumal was at very close quarters to her and He holds her hand above His during the Laja homa. On both these occasions, she refers to the half-man half-beast figure of the Perumal. Perumal, born out of a pillar, is neither a man nor a beast and yet both man and lion. Rukmani in her love epistle to Lord Krishna addressed Krishna as "Kale Narasimha" i.e. Narasimha should come at the correct moment, even as He made a timely appearance to solve Prahladha's problems. She therefore requests Him to again make a timely appearance and rescue her. These among others are some of the outstanding references to the Lord as Narasimha.

Another unique aspect that is evident while referring to Narasimha avatara is that this is the only avatara where God shows His fury. It is said the greater the love that the Lord has towards His devotees, the greater is His anger when He finds His devotee being tortured. That is why Rama who was known for never getting angry (Seetramiladhan - Tamil word) lost his temper only when He saw that the arrows of Ravana injured His Baktha Siriya Tiruvadi i.e. Hanuman.

Pancharatrasastram says that the Lord Narayana has four main primary aspects i.e. Vyuha forms. They are: Vasudeva, Sankarshana (lion), Pradhyumna (boar) and Aniruddha. Thus, the Narasimha form of manifestation is one of the four important vyuha forms of the Lord.

Narasimha Parvatapani Upanishad also says that Perumal appeared before Brahma as Narasimha first and taught him the Narasimha Anushtup Mantra with which he was able to develop the four vedas. The Anushtup mantra is as follows:-

*Ugram, veeram, Mahavishnum, Jwalantham,
Sarvathomukam, Nrisimham Beeshanam
Badram mrutyo mrutyum Namamyaham*

This Anushtup mantra mentions the nine forms of Narasimha i.e. Nava Narasimha. They are: Ugra (angry) Veera (fighting), Mahavishnu (Lakshminarasimha), Jwalanatha (figure emitting flames), Sarvathomukha (Narasimha with a number of faces), Narasimha (ordinary Narasimha avatara), Bheeshana (frightful), Bhadra (terrible), Mrutyo mrutyu (killer of death).

Ahobalam in Andhra Pradesh is a Nava Narasimha kshetra. Hence its importance. This is a famous pilgrim centre of very great antiquity. It has religious and spiritual significance. It is about 68 kilometers from Nandyal Railway station and 24 kilometers from Arlagadda Taluk headquarters. One can alight at Nandyal railway station and catch a bus which will go to Ahobala via Arlagadda. One can also get down at Cuddappah railway station on the Madras-Bombay route; from there, proceed to Arlagadda which is 64 kilometers away by bus and another 32 kilometers away is Ahobalam. One can also get down at Dhone railway station and then via Banganapalli and Koilkunta, reach Ahobalam. The place is known varyingly as Ahobalam, Ahobilam, Singavel Kundram, Nava Narasimha kshetra, Pancha krosa kshetra. In all the inscriptions available in the temples, this place is referred to as Ahobalam. The reason why this place is known as "Aho Balam" will be related later on in this chapter.

Once we reach Ahobalam at the foot of the hill is the temple of Prahladha Varada Narasimha Swami i.e. Lord Narasimha blessing Prahladha. Locally it is popularly known as Chinna Ahobalam or Diguva Tirupati. Eight kilometers away from Lower Ahobalam up the hill is Upper Ahobalam. It has a motorable road. It is about 2800 feet above sea level. The route to Upper Ahobalam is breath-takingly beautiful passing thro' fairly thick forests, hills and a number of water-falls. It is a natural scenic beauty spot. The two crests of the Hill are called Vedhadri and Garudadri. Bhavanasini theertha flows through

the two hills. The theertha is therefore an antharvahini i.e. a river which flows inside the hills during part of its course. Upper Ahobala is also referred to as Nagari Nithni or Yeguva Tirupati or Pedda Ahobalam. The Lord at Upper Ahobala is a swayambhu Perumal, as He manifested Himself in a natural cave in the rock.

This entire place is a part of Nallamalai hills. This range extends from Kurnool to Chittoor district in Andhra. There is a passage in the puranas which says that the entire Nalla malai hills is the personification of Lord Adishesha Himself; the tail-end is Srisailam, the middle part is Ahobalam and the head is Tirupati. Thus the two divya desams in Andhra Pradesh are believed to be located on Lord Adishesha himself. The kshetra mahatmyam of Simhachala temple also says that there are four important sacred places on the earth and one amongst them is Ahobalam. Sthala purana of this temple is available in Brahmanda purana and is covered in nearly ten chapters. The first chapter deals with the greatness of this kshetra; the second with the penance of Garuda for darshan of the Lord; the third gives an account of the theerthas in this place. The fourth details the Nara Narasimha kshetra and refers to the penance performed by Brahma, Bharadwaja Gobila rishis and Bhargava Rama. The fifth chapter details the story of Jaya-Vijaya and their birth as Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu and the assurance given by the Lord to these two dwarapalakas to take them back to Vaikuntha as early as possible after they complete their demonic existence in this world. The sixth chapter deals with the childhood of Prahladha and the atrocities inflicted on him by Hiranyakasipu. The seventh chapter deals with the devotion of Prahladha to Narayana and the manifestation of Narasimha from a pillar in the palace of Hiranyakasipu and the destruction of the demon. The eighth chapter mentions the Sharabha avatara of Shiva and its destruction by Lord Narasimha. The ninth chapter refers to the untiring efforts of Bhairava for bringing the river Bhava nasini to this place and his becoming a kshetrapala of this place. The tenth chapter says that worship of Lord Narasimha is the only way to attain moksha when one is not able to go through the path pointed out in the vedic scriptures.

There are two stories explaining the name of this place i.e. Ahobalam. As stated earlier, this place was the kingdom of Hiranyakasipu in Krita yuga (this place was also known as Vedachala, Garudachala, Veera kshetra and Singevel kundram). When Prahladha, the child devotee was being tortured beyond a point by his father and he asked haughtily of the child whether his Narayana could be found in a pillar and kicked the pillar, Narasimha emerged out of it. It is said that Devas were witnessing this terrific (ugrakala) fury shown by the God and when He tore to pieces the asura, they sung His praise as Aho Bala i.e. "Lo! What Strength". The place, therefore, got the name Ahobalam. To support this theory, there is a Prapatti sloka which runs as follows:

*"Aho veeryam aho sowryam aho bahu parakramaha
Naarasimham param deivam Ahobalam, Ahobalam".*

In this sloka the Gods praised the strength of Narasimha. This accounts for this place being known as Aho balam. This is the place where the great strength of Narayana in His Narasimha avatar was witnessed by the Devas.

Another legend connected with this place says that in the great cave known as Ahobila, Garuda worshipped the Lord and he realised the Lord in that place and hence the place came to be known as Ahobilam. Ahobilam kaifiyat supports this legend. Ahobilam Kaifiyat is a part of Mackenjee collection. It gives valuable information regarding Ahobilam. The Kaifiyat refers to the digest from Kaviles or village registers containing information on the political, religious, social, economic and other conditions of the villages in the Deccan. These were prepared by Pandits and Mussabbis working under Col. Mackenjee. This Kaifiyat is in Telegu and is available in the State Archives, Hyderabad. In that record, the following information is mentioned viz. "On one of the mountains in the Nallamalai hills range 8 Amandas from Srisaila kshetra, Garuda commenced silent penance to obtain a vision of the Lord Narasimha Who destroyed Hiranyakasipu. The Lord in His grace, after long years of tapas of Garuda, manifested Himself in the cave of a mountain. Ten paduvus north-east of the mountain where Garuda was doing penance, a vision of His manifestation was then granted to Garuda who,

after obtaining a sign of the location of the mountain cave gladly travelled thither and saw the embodiment of the Sat swaroopa Mahapurusha Lord Jwala Narasimha, not easily accessible to common people. Garuda then worshipped the Lord and praised Him saying Ahobilam is Ahobalam (Ahobilam is a great sustainer with strength)". The Lord's divya mangala vigraha was then worshipped by Garuda with many stotras. This divine place therefore obtained the deserving name of Ahobilam, that is to say, the mountain where Garuda performed tapas and had a vision of Lord Narasimha Who destroyed Hiranyakasipu. Hence the place came to be known as Garudachala. It is said that in the olden days when truth and dharma prevailed, the great heat emanated from the mountain cave of Ahobila. According to a legend, even when green grass was put in the cave, it would catch fire and smoke would be emitted. Later to protect the people, the entrance of that cave was blocked with boulders.

Ahobala kshetra is also known as Pancha krosa theertha or kshetra as nine Narasimha shrines are situated within a radius of five krosa or 10 miles (16 kilometers).

As mentioned earlier, the hill is known as Garudachala as also Vedachala. Earlier the reason for its acquiring the name of Garudachala has been explained. It is said that the hill got the name Vedachala, as Brahma came here to this hill and prayed to Lord Narasimha to restore the vedas which were stolen from him by Somaka, an asura. The God then appeared and restored the vedas by killing Somaka. Hence the hill came to be known as Vedachala.

Besides Brahmanda Purana, various other puranas like Koorma purana, Padma purana, Vishnu purana as also Mahabharatha mention about Ahobalam and the presiding deity Narasimha.

Let us now briefly recall the story of Prahladha as it is closely inter-twined with the religious significance attached to this divya desa. It is said that once upon a time in Vaikuntha, the dwarapalakas Jaya and Vijaya prevented Sanathkumara from entering Vaikuntha. Finding that the path was obstructed,

they cursed the dwara palakas saying that they will be born in Bhooloka as demons. The dwarapalakas immediately rushed to Narayana and sought His protection. The Lord assured them that in due course He would rescue them and bring them back to Vaikuntha. Ahobalam was the capital of Hiranyakasipu who was one of the erstwhile dwarapalakas of Lord Vishnu. Hiranyakasipu had obtained the boon from the devas of not meeting with his death thro' a person, sura or asura, or man or beast, or at any time of the day or night or at any place on the earth, in the sky or over the water. The demon thought that he had become invincible and he used to boast "Aham Brahmasmi" i.e. "I am the Highest". But, unknown to him, it was his son who protested at this tall claim of the father. The boy Prahladha was tortured for holding the blasphemous theory of Lord Narayana being the Supreme and not Hiranyakasipu. The child paid the penalty for this devotion by being thrown from the highest peak, by being trampled upon by elephant, by being shut in a chamber full of venomous snakes, by having poison poured down his throat, by being put into a frying pan and by being thrown into the sea with huge rocks tied to his head. But all the tortures were of no avail and the boy steadfastly held on to his belief that Lord Vishnu is the ultimate truth and that He is omnipresent and adored by everyone. One day in a moment of frenzy, Hiranyakasipu asked the child to show him his omnipresent God. He asked him: "Is he in this pillar?" and he kicked one of the pillars in his palace, thinking that as he had built the palace himself surely Narayana could not be hidden in that pillar. But, the moment he kicked the pillar, there emerged Narasimha who was neither a man nor a beast. The time was dusk; so it was neither day nor night. Perumal caught hold of the demon, put him on His lap and tore him to pieces. Thus the demon met with his death at a place which was neither the earth nor the sky nor the water but the thigh of Perumal. The death was caused not by any weapon but by the dagger-like sharp nails of Perumal who tore the entrails of the asura's stomach. Thus it was that Perumal lived upto the absolute faith reposed in Him by the child devotee and proved His omnipresence and omnipotence. An utsava vigraha in Lower Ahobalam depicts in great detail this destruction of Hiranyakasipu by the Lord. The said utsava vigraha has ten

hands. He is seen as Samharamurthi. The ten hands give dharshan as follows: One hand of God holds down the head of Hiranyakasipu who is placed on His lap. The second hand holds down the legs of Hiranyakasipu. The third and the fourth hands are tearing the asura's stomach. The fifth and the sixth hands are used to drink the blood of the demon. The seventh and the eighth hands are holding the Shankhu and Chakra. The ninth and the tenth hands are also holding weapons. This gory sight usually gets covered by the garment with which the utsava vigraha is covered. But if one is interested the poojari will remove the garment and show the beautiful manner in which the sculptor has brought to life the incident of destruction of the demon by the Lord.

Ahobala sthalapurana in Sanskrit gives a detailed account of the nine forms of Narasimha worshipped in this place. I now propose to describe briefly the Nara Narasimha forms in Ahobalam.

At the foot of the hill is the temple of Prahladha Varada Narasimha Swami. Here the Lord is blessing Prahladha. The temple in Lower Ahobalam is dedicated to Lakshmi Narasimha Swami. The God is facing east. To the left of the principal deity, the utsava idols of Pavana Narasimha Swami are installed. In front of that, on a separate pedestal is located the utsava idols of Prahladha Varada along with his two consorts. In front of these utsava idols are the processional deities of Jwala Narasimha Swami endowed with ten hands and His two consorts, Sri Devi and Bhoo Devi. A small copper idol of the Jeer, the founder of Ahobala mutt is also kept before them facing the south.

The next Narasimha kshetra is that of Bhargava Narasimha Swami. This temple is situated at a distance of two kilometers from Lower Ahobalam. It is on a hill near the sacred pond known as Bhargava theertham. It is believed that Bhargava Rama did penance here. The Lord is therefore known as Bhargava Narasimha Swami.

The next Narasimha Kshetra is that of Yogananda Narasimha Swami. This temple is $2\frac{1}{2}$ kilometers south east of

the Lower Ahobalam. It is said that after killing Hiranyakasipu Lord Narasimha taught the child devotee Prahladha several yogic postures. Lord Narasimha is therefore known as Yogananda Narasimha here.

The next Narasimha kshetra in this place is Chatravata Narasimha Swami. It is about three kilometers away from the Lower Ahobalam. The idol of Narasimha is under a peepul tree surrounded by thorny bushes. Chatravata means "under an umbrella". Here the peepul tree acts as an umbrella. Hence the idol here is known as Chatravata Narasimha Swami.

The next Narasimha kshetra is in Upper Ahobalam. Upper Ahobalam is at a distance of 8 kilometers from the Lower Ahobalam. The Lord here is swayambhu (self manifested) idol. He is in a cavern in a rock. The temple consists of a sanctum which is the cave itself. It has shrine for Sudharsana and Chenchulakshmi. A small river Bavanasini flows to the east of the temple. Near the sanctum in a verandah can be seen the Chenchu bride of Lord Narasimha Swami. Nearby in a deserted room it is believed that the lawful wedded wife of Vishnu is staying! The Kurnool District Manual has a very interesting story. It says that Lakshmi, the lawful wedded wife of Vishnu was offended by her husband's faithlessness and went up the hills and took her abode on the top of the Moonukonda peak. This might have been the local legend collected by the people who wrote the Kurnool District Manual.

The utsava murthy of the Upper Ahobalam temple is installed in the temple of Lakshmi Narasimha Swami of Lower Ahobalam. It is this Narasimha Swami in the cave Who is the main deity for this divya kshetra/desa.

Another Narasimha kshetra in this hill is that of Krodhakara Narasimha Swami. This temple is about one kilometer away from the main temple at Upper Ahobalam. The deity's image has the face of a boar (varaha or krodha). The Lord is seen along with His consort Lakshmi. The God here is known as Krodhakara Narasimha Swami. It is believed that if Narayana Sadakshara Japa parayana of Varaha Kanda is done at this

shrine for three days great spiritual benefit will accrue to the devotee.

Another Narasimha shrine in this kshetra is Karanja Narasimha Swami. This shrine is situated at a distance of one kilometer from Upper Ahobalam. It lies about one furlong from the road leading to Lower Ahobalam. The image is installed under a tree called Karanja vruksham. Hence the shrine is known as Karanja Narasimha Swami shrine. Here the Lord is seen holding the Sarngam and dhanus in His hand and chakra in the other hand. He is seen in a seated posture. The theertha here is known as Bhairava kundam. It is believed that Gobila rishi who angered Durvasa rishi and was cursed by him came and did tapas and prayed to the Lord here and was rewarded with the dharshan of Narasimha Swami.

The next shrine is that of Malola Narasimha Swami. It is situated about two kilometers from the main temple at Upper Ahobalam. The deity here has a graceful sowmya form. Lord Narasimha Swami is seen here with His consort Lakshmi. Malola means beloved of Lakshmi. Maa refers to Lakshmi; Lola means beloved. Utsava murthi of this Lord is in the custody of the Jeers of Ahobala Mutt. It is said that the first Jeer Srimand Adhivan Satagopa Jeer had this utsava murthi in his custody and since then all the successor Jeers until now carry this utsava idol along with them wherever they travel.

The next Narasimha Swami shrine is known as Jwala Narasimha Swami shrine. This is located higher up above Malola Narasimha Swami temple. It is on a hill which is known as Achala Chaya Meru hill. It lies about four kilometers away from the Upper Ahobalam temple. This is believed to be the spot where the fury of the Lord reached its culmination and he tore to pieces Hiranyakasipu, the asura. The stone image is about 3 feet high. It has ten hands. The upper hands hold chakra and shanku. Two hands hold the demon Hiranyakasipu on the lap of the Lord. The Lord is in His suhasana pose i.e. left leg folded and right leg hanging down freely. The other hands are holding weapons and tearing out the intestines of the demon

1 and destroying Hiranyakasipu. A small idol of Prahladha in the anjali hastha pose is also seen on the right side of the Lord.

The ninth shrine which lies on the bank of the river Pavana about six kilometers away from Upper Ahobalam temple is known as Pavana Narasimha Swami shrine. The Lord got His name after the name of the river.

Besides these nine shrines, at a distance of eight kilometers from the Upper Ahobalam temple, there is a cleft in the mountain which divides the mountain into two clearly visible parts. It is firmly and widely believed that it is from this cleft that the Lord appeared in the form of Narasimha. This cleft is known as Ugra sthamba. Here the shanku, chakra and namam are clearly carved on the face of the hill.

Yet another interesting shrine, though small, which is situated in a cave on this hill lies in between the Ugrasthamba and the upper Ahobalam. It is dedicated to Prahlada Narasimha Swami. The image of Prahladha is installed in a small cave. This is locally known as Prahladha Mettu.

Let us now briefly mention about the holy theerthas (tanks) in this kshetra. There are a number of theerthas in this place. The most important is known as Rakthakunda. It is believed that Lord Narasimha Swami, after killing Hiranyakasipu, washed His hands in this theertha. The water is therefore still reddish in appearance.

Another theertha in this divya desa is known as Lanja koneru. It lies about three kilometers to the north-east of the shrine - Bhargava Narasimha Swami shrine. It is said that once upon a time a courtesan (lanja), on having dharshan of Lord Narasimha Swami here, repented of her ways and built the theertha to atone for her sins and washed off her sins.

Rama theertha is another tank which lies about eight kilometers from Lower Ahobalam. It is believed that Sri Rama had His bath in this tank and hence His name is associated with it.

The main theertha is known as Pavanasini as it gets rid of the sins of the cycle of birth and death. There are at least a dozen theertham combined in this Pavanasini theertha viz. Narasimha theertha, Rama theertha, Lakshmana theertha, Bheema theertha, Shanku theertha, Varaha theertha, Sudharsana theertha, Sootha theertha, Dhora theertha, Gajakunta, Vainayaka Theertha, Bhairava theertha and Rajathakunta. All these thirteen theerthas join in Pavanasini and add to its holy nature.

There are a number of small popular legends connected with this kshetra. The Chenchus are a local tribe and they are closely associated with the Lord and the temple here. A popular legend is that when Lord Vishnu took incarnation as Lord Narasimha, Goddess Lakshmi was born in the Chenchu tribe and both lived happily in Ahobalam and God refused to go back to Vaikuntam also.¹

The life of Narasimha with Chenchita is depicted in many folk songs of the area. There are a number of sculptures in the temple which depict Narasimha and Chenchita on the pillars in the Upper Ahobalam as well as the Lower Ahobalam temple. The sculptures are seen in Mukha mandapa in Upper Ahobalam and in the Ranga mandapa in Lower Ahobalam.

The Chenchus called Lord Narasimha as "Obalesudu". They believe that Lord Narasimha is their brother-in-law. Whenever they go to the temple, they carry clothes and presents for the deity. Even today this tribe enjoys certain privileges in the Ahobalam temple.

Besides, a Sanskrit Drama Vasanthika Parinaya written by the Seventh Jeer of the Ahobala Mutt Srivan Sadagopa describes the marriage of the Lord with Chenchita and this lends some credence to the popular legends.²

Another interesting story connected with this place is the belief that Brahma Himself worshipped the Lord here. It is in

¹ Census of India, 1961 Volume II Andhra Pradesh, Part vii (b) 2 page 41.

² Temples and Legends of Andhra Pradesh by N.Ramesan Page 27.

this place that the God in idol form (Lord Lakshmi Narasimha) was worshipped by two Gods in human form, viz. Lord Sri Rama and Lord Venkateswara. It is said that Lord Venkateswara married Padmavathi only after worshipping Lord Narasimha at Ahobalam.³

Similarly Lord Sri Rama worshipped Lord Lakshmi Narasimha in this kshetra and sang five verses in praise of the Perumal. This is known as Narasimha Panchamirtham. This can be found in Sesha Dharma, Hari Vamsa in the form of a conversation between Bhishma and Yudhistira. It is claimed that only after offering worship to Lord Narasimha here Sri Rama got information about the whereabouts of His consort Sita Devi which ultimately led to the killing of Ravana and the union with Jaganmatha.

Another interesting belief is that it was in this kshetra that God taught the Kakatheeya king, Pratapa Rudra the oneness of Shiva and Vishnu. Ahobalam Kaifiyat says that Pratapa Rudra gifted some idols, renovated mandapas in the temple and made arrangements for conducting utsavas in the temple. It is said that when Pratapa Rudra returned from Srisailam, he stopped at Rudra varam which is about 25 kilometers from Ahobalam.

The king wanted to cast a gold Shivalinga but whenever the cast was made, the figure that emerged was that of Lord Narasimha. The king was worried as he thought this was a bad omen. One day, however, the Lord appeared in his dream and directed him to go to Upper Ahobalam and worship Lord Narasimha there. God told the king that it was futile to make distinction between Shiva and Vishnu and also told him that the Lord was the same in whatever form He was worshipped. Accordingly he worshipped Lord Narasimha and gifted that small gold vigraha to Ahobala mutt. He also became the sishya of the then Jeer. He endowed lands for the maintenance of the temple and gifted a number of ornaments to the Lord. It is that gold vigraha which is still in the possession of the Ahobala Mutt Jeers even today.

³ *Sri Ahobila Kshetra and Sri Ahobila Mutt Page 3 by*

The history of Ahobala mutt is closely inter- twined with the history of this kshetra. Ahobalam as stated earlier is a seat of religious and spiritual activities. It is the seat of the famous Ahobala Mutt which is of importance to the Vaishnavites. The first spiritual head of this mutt i.e. Jeer was initiated into sanyas by Lord Narasimha Himself. Young Srinivasachariar was the son of Kidambi Kesavacharya of Melkote. When he was hardly twenty years old, he had already mastered the various scriptures. Once Krishna deva raya of Vijaya nagar dynasty called a conference to discuss the merits of several religious philosophies, he was to be the judge. At that discussion a youth who was Ramanuja's follower appeared on the stage. His appearance was striking. The whole audience and even the king spontaneously rose and saluted him. His cogent arguments carried the day and established the superiority of the teachings of Ramanuja. It is said that subsequently this youth had a vision directing him to go to Ahobalam and receive sanyasa. The king also at the same time had a vision to receive the youth with all temple honours at Ahobalam. The boy decided to follow the direction issued to him in his dream and proceeded to Ahobalam. When he reached lower Ahobalam, God appeared in the shape of a Brahman and initiated the youth into sanyasa. As directed by the king, Mukundaraya, the chieftain received the young sanyasi at the temple premises. Lord in the form of Yogi initiated him and named him Satagopa Yathi. This is commomerated in the following mangala sloka:

*"Bale Sri Nrusimha Prash Mantra swayam thathow Yogi
Roopaena Yesyosmai Satagopaya mangalam".*

This incident is recorded in the form of images carved in many places in Lower Ahobalam temple. It was this youth who was made the trustee of the temple with hereditary rights. It is his successors who are now the hereditary trustees and the Jeers of the Ahobala Mutt.

The life histories of many of the Jeers of the Ahobala mutt cover certain interesting stories about how Lord Narasimha even today comes to the rescue of His sincere devotees. I propose to relate one incident as an illustration. The thirty third Jeer of Ahobala Mutt was one day proceeding in the late afternoon

through the dense forests near this kshetra to Mysore. He was going on foot. As the dusk approached he located a spot near a small rivulet. He decided to perform the evening pooja to Lord Narasimha there. Even as he was settling down, there was a commotion. The disciples and attendants who were accompanying him came rushing to him and with fright in their voices announced that dacoits had come to loot their property. The Jeer was unperturbed. He called the leader of the dacoit gang and calmly informed him that all that they possessed belonged to God; they were free to take them if they desired but he requested them to permit him to finish his pooja first and said that after the pooja was performed the gang could take whatever they liked. The leader of the dacoit gang agreed. The Jeer commenced his pooja. Usually everyday the neivedhyam used to be paanakam i.e. jaggery water; but, that day the Jeer asked his followers to prepare chakkarai pongal i.e. sweetened rice preparation to be offered to God. After completing his prayers and offering neivedhyam to God, he did mangala harathi to the deity three times. At the end of the third round, the dacoits suddenly fell at the feet of the Jeer and frantically shouted, "Swami, protect us. A number of lions are attacking us". The Jeer could not see them; nor could he hear the roars which the dacoits heard. The Jeer however smiled. He had realised that it was the leela of Malola and that the Lord had come to his rescue. The Jeer requested the lions to disappear. The dacoits who came to rob fell at his feet. They accompanied the Jeer and the party safely out of the forest.⁴

A number of festivals are celebrated in this kshetra. It is proposed to mention here the details relating to one important festival, viz. the annual Brahmotsavam which takes place in the first fortnight of Palguna month. It usually takes place about a fortnight after Sivarathri. A peculiar custom is observed while celebrating this festival.⁵

This custom illustrates the love the people of this place have to this Lord whom they regard as their personal property.

⁴ *Narasimhapriya, English Edition, December 1987 Pages 18 and 19.*

⁵ *Temples and Legends of Andhra Pradesh by N.Ramesan Page 29.*

The Padma salis of this place believe that the divine consort is a maiden of their class. So they feel they have a right to perform the Kalyana utsava to the Lord. Because of this legend and belief that the Thayar is their daughter, an interesting custom has grown around this legend. The utsava vigrahams of both the Lord and the Goddess are brought out and placed in the Kalyana mandapam. Negotiations for the marriage of the Goddess who is believed to be born as one amongst the Padma salis are started between the representatives of that particular community and the divine Lord himself. Padma salis form themselves into a group. Lots are cast and a person is selected by this draw of lots for performing the marriage ceremony of the Goddess with the Lord. Whoever succeeds in the lot is considered the most fortunate person and naturally the celebration of the wedding of the divine couple is considered as the most auspicious event of his whole life. This is how legend and realities get inter-twined through religious belief and devotion.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

There are nearly 30 inscriptions in this temple both at Lower Ahobalam and Upper Ahobalam. This has been beautifully recorded by Dr. Madabooshni Narasimhacharya in his book "History of the cult of Narasimha in Andhra Pradesh". In this part of my chapter I have borrowed heavily from his book and I wish to publicly acknowledge my sincere thanks to him for his detailed authentic research oriented work. The detailed manner in which he has recorded the epigraphical evidences gives certain life to the dry-as-dust historical facts.

It is now proposed to briefly run through some of the inscriptions.

The Kakatheeyas of Warrangal protected the kingdom from the onslaught of Muslims. They were great patrons of art and letters. One of the inscriptions proves that Pratapa Rudra (1295 - 1323 A.D.) one of their kings had great faith in Ahobaleswarar of Ahobalam.⁶

⁶ *History of the Cult of Narasimha in Andhra Pradesh by Dr. Madabushani Narasimhacharya Page 61*

Another inscription says that during the Western Chalukyan king Tribhuvana Malla Deva's reign his feudatory Maha Mandaleswara Chiddana made grant of the village Mudiveemu to the mahajana of the place in the presence of God Narasimha of Ahobalam.⁷

The Reddis of Kondaveedu were also sincere devotees of Lord Narasimha. The founder of this dynasty Perolaya Vema Reddi (1324 - 1353 A.D.) ruled his kingdom from Addanki. An inscription of 1335 says that he built steps to Upper Ahobalam.⁸

Another inscription of 1345 AD from Amaravathi confirms this noble work done by Reddi king.⁹

Another inscription of 1378 AD relates to the period of Reddi king Anavema. He is believed to have built some more steps to Upper Ahobalam.¹⁰

Vijayanagar kings were also great devotees of Lord Narasimha. Harihara-II (1377 - 1404 AD) struck coins with the emblem of Lakshmi Narasimha. He also built a divya mandapam in 1395 AD for Lord Narasimha.¹¹

King Bukka-I gifted a village to Lord Narasimha for providing Anga, Ranga, bhoga to Sri Aubula Devara. This was done in 1350 AD.¹²

Mallikarjuna Maha Rayalu (1447 - 1465 AD) Gopayya Deva Maharaja endowed a village - Jillela for offering daily neivedhya to Ahobaleswarar of Ahobalam. This was done in 1459 - 1460 AD.¹³

⁷ *ibid* page 59

⁸ *Annual Reports on Indian Epigraphy 1956-57 Appendix B serial no. 46*

⁹ *Inscriptions of Andhra Desam Volume 2 Part I Guntur District S.No. 472 page 274.*

¹⁰ *ibid*, S.No. 196 page 247.

¹¹ *History of the Cult of Narasimha in Andhra Pradesh by Dr.Madabusani Narasimhacharya page 82.*

¹² *ibid* page 83

¹³ *ibid* page 84

Krishnadeva Raya (1512 - 1529 AD) started on his campaign to conquer Kalinga. En route he visited Ahobala. He gifted thousand varahas, a necklace, a ruby and a diamond pendant inset with an emerald, a pair of bracelets set with rubies and a gold plate to Lord Narasimha in 1515 AD. His queen also separately gifted a pendant. The king gifted an entire village Mathooru to provide for the worship and offerings to God.¹⁴

The successor to Krishna devaraya i.e. Achutha devaraya also struck coins with Ganda Perunda. This Ganda Perunda is said to be an aspect of Lord Narasimha Himself.

Chinna Thimma Raju, an officer of Sadasiva raya king also gifted a whole village to Ramanuja koodam at Ahobalam¹⁵

Another inscription records that in 1547 AD Maha Mandaleswara Maharaja remitted marga sunkam and other taxes on rice, salt etc. carried by the bullocks to Ahobala from Udayagiri seema for worship and offering to the Lord.¹⁶

Another inscription says that in 1551 AD during Sadasiva Raya's reign one Nandyala Thimma Rajiah made an endowment of land for feeding 12 Srivaishnavas daily in the Nammalwar shrine at Upper Ahobalam temple, after offering neivedhya to the Lord.¹⁷

In 1553 AD one Maha Mandaleswara Aparathika mall Karucheti Venkatadri Deva Maharaja endowed cash for providing neivedhya to the Lord in Upper Ahobalam temple on the occasion when Lord will be seated in the 16 pillared mandapam built by the said person.¹⁸

In 1555 AD Ganapathi Deva Maharaju grandson of Maha Mandaleswara Krishna raja, gifted land to Lord Narasimha Swami of Ahobalam.¹⁹

¹⁴ *History of the Cult of Narasimha in Andhra Pradesh by Dr. Madabusani Narasimhacharya page 85*

¹⁵ *ibid page 88*

¹⁶ *ibid page 89*

¹⁷ *History of the Cult of Narasimha in Andhra Pradesh by Dr. Madabusani Narasimhacharya page 91*

¹⁸ *ibid page 91*

¹⁹ *ibid page 92*

Another inscription of 1558 AD says that Obalaraju grandson of Maha Mandaleswara Pochi Raju Rama raju made a provision for daily offering in the Nammalwar shrine in Lower Ahobalam. This offering also was to be distributed among twelve Sri vaishnavites.²⁰

In 1560 AD one Gopinatha Raju of Juturu provided for offering to Ahobaleswara when he is seated in the four-pillared mandapam in Lower Ahobalam temple.²¹

Another inscription of 1561 AD available in Lower Ahobalam temple gives in great detail the ritual performed in the temple. It records that a whole village was endowed for providing Sringara talikai (a sumptuous dishes of six plates) daily to Prahladha Varada Swami at Diguva Tirupati. In addition, a talikai each for Sri Bhashyakara and Alwars and oil for lighting lamps in the temple were also endowed. Besides, provision was made for paying in cash to persons offering worship to the Alwars. Cash was also to be given to the servant who ties the thoranam and to the person who does the Abishekam to the Lord and so on. There is mention about other services like Keemari (Pottery) Medari (casket maker) bogam Mala (musicians). Thus in detail the amounts to be given and the persons to whom it is to be given are indicated.²²

Another inscription indicates that five grants of land were made to temples at Ahobalam during the reign of the king Sadasiva in 1563 AD. The first grant of land was by one Maha Mandaleswara Obul Raju for offering worship in the shrine of Nammalwar. The second grant was made by Maha Mandaleswara Koneti Obula Rajiah Deva Maharaja for providing offerings to Ahobaleswara. The third grant was made by one Vedudri Bhatlevaru Rama Rajiah Garu. This was also for providing offerings to Lord Ahobaleswara. The fourth grant was also a gift of a village by one Avubhale Maharaja for meeting the expenses incurred towards providing offerings to the Lord in Upper Ahobalam.

²⁰ *ibid* page 92

²¹ *History of the Cult of Narasimha in Andhra Pradesh by Dr. Madabhusani Narasimhacharya* page 93.

²² *ibid* page 93

The fifth grant was made by one Sathagupta Jeeyamgaru for providing offerings to Lord Ahobaleswarar seated in the mandap. The same Jeeyamgaru in 1564 gifted a land for meeting the expenses in connection with making special offerings during the garden festivals in the month of Chaitram when God will be seated near the tank on the way to Bhargavam.²³

The next inscription comes only after twenty years. This refers to 1584 and relates to the reign of Sri Ranga - I. It says that the temple of Ahobalam was sacked in the year 1579 AD by Ibrahim Kutubsha of Golconda in alliance with Honde chiefs of Anantapur who were ardent Saivites. That inscription says that Ranga Raya deva of Vijayanagar dynasty defeated the vandals and restored the prosperity of the place.²⁴

Another inscription relating to 1586 AD says that one Maha Mandaleswara Venkata Raju deva choda maharaja granted 80 varahas to the temple to meet the expenditure towards certain services.²⁵

An inscription of 1590 refers to some land having been gifted by one Savaram Rengappa Raju of Mallappa Chinthakunta for providing offerings to God Prahladha Varada Narasimha Swami of Lower Ahobalam.²⁶

An inscription of 1609 AD says that the Vijaya nagar king Venkatapathi Raya deva-II gifted seven gold kalasams for the big gopuram tower of Veera Narasimha Swami temple in Lower Ahobalam. In the same year two Vim chamarams (fly whisks) and white silk umbrella with gilt kalasam over it were gifted to Lord of Ahobala at Diguva Tirupati by some merchants of Aaravidu.²⁷

²³ *History of the Cult of Narasimha in Andhra Pradesh* by Dr. Madabhusani Narasimhacharya page 93 and 94.

²⁴ *History of the Cult of Narasimha in Andhra Pradesh* by Dr. Madabhusani Narasimhacharya page 95.

²⁵ *ibid* page 95

²⁶ *ibid* page 95

²⁷ *Annual Reports on Indian Epigraphy 1914-15, Appendix C Serial No. 671.*

In 1619 AD, an inscription says that again the temple was sacked by the muslims who took away the gold-plated vahanams of the Lord.

Van Satagopa Jiyyangar the 7th pontiff of Ahobala mutt appealed to Rengaraya deva of Vijayanagar kingdom who ruled between 1578 and 1587 AD to restore the Ahobalam temple to its original glory by expelling the muslim forces from there. The king had great regard for the Jeer and he is stated to have ordered his Chiefs Tirumalairaju and Venkata Raju to go with the Jeer to Ahobalam and vacate the muslims. The muslims were accordingly expelled from Ahobalam. That victory was commemorated by setting up a Jaya sthambam which can be seen even today outside the Lower Ahobalam temple.

Some inscriptions though of lesser importance but equally interesting will now be related. There is an inscription of 1410 AD which says that Ketana Reddi Vema Reddi, founder of Rajamahendrawaram Reddi line gifted Kaluvacheru village in order to provide daily offerings in the temple of Ahobaleswara. This gift was for the benefit of Komaragiri Raja.²⁸

Another inscription of 1547 AD records an endowment in cash by one Ugra sayya of Gudiya Chelluru for offerings to God Narasimha of Ahobalam during Ksheerapathi and other festivals.²⁹

Another inscription from Chinna Ahobalam relates to 1548 AD. It says that Narasamma constructed a Vasanta mandapam to the north of Thiguva Tirupati. She endowed 120 varahas to the temple. This was to be used while celebrating festivals when Ahobaleswarar is seated in Vasantha mandapam.³⁰

Another inscription relating to 1554 AD found in Chinna Ahobalam temple registers the sale of a grove and flower garden for 50 varahas in the village of Alamuru. The land was said to belong to God Himself. It was sold by Parangusavam Satagopa

²⁸ *South Indian Inscriptions Vol. X SL.No.577 Page 319.*

²⁹ *South Indian Inscriptions Vol.LXVI S.No. 159.*

³⁰ *South Indian Inscriptions Vol. XVI SL.No.169.*

Jeer and other trustees of the temple on condition that one-third of the produce was to be given to God and the rest could be used by the buyer.³¹

There are 9 undated inscriptions in the two temples, 4 belong to Lower Ahobalam and 5 belong to Upper Ahobalam. One such inscription mentions that a person from Perur village built the Ksheerapthi Nava Narasimha mandapam for Ahobaleswarar.³²

Another inscription from the same temple relates to the reign of Sadasiva (1542-1576 AD) of Vijaya nagar dynasty. It says that a village was granted in Podiliseemai for providing offerings to God when He is seated in a certain mandapam.³³

Another inscription says that a goldsmith by name Pasayya gifted an image of Hanuman to the temple.³⁴

Another undated inscription says that one Maha Mandaleeswara Soorappa Obalayya Deva Maharaja built a Garuda sthamba in the street opposite to the temple. He also deposited some money in the temple trasury to provide offerings on 220 festival days in the year when God was brought in procession and seated on the platform over this pillar.³⁵

The five undated inscriptions of Upper Ahobalam temple refer to the construction of a mandapam and gifts made to the temple. Three such inscriptions give a long list of various items required for making dishes to be offered to Sri Bashyakara Ramanuja in twelve days of his Thirunakshatram in each month of the year.³⁶

³¹ *ibid* Vol. XIV S.No. 200.

³² *Annual Reports on Indian Epigraphy 1914-15 Appendix C. Serial No. 57.*

³³ *ibid* Serial No. 62

³⁴ *ibid* Serial No. 74.

³⁵ *Topographical List of Inscriptions of Madras Presidency by V. Rangacharya Vol. II S.No. 590.*

³⁶ *Annual Reports on Indian Epigraphy 1914-15. Appendix C. Serial No.83*

Another inscription on the way to Jwala Narasimha Swami shrine says that a devotee by name Narasimha Jeeyamgaru built a mandap for the deity.³⁷

Another inscription at a pillar in the Upper Ahobalam temple says that a certain Ramana Raya Naidu gifted a Garuda sthamba to Sri Ahobaleswarar.³⁸

Another undated inscription in Upper Ahobalam temple records that some varahas were gifted and the village Kallutla was gifted for providing offerings to the Lord when He is seated in a mandapam in Dhiguva Ahobalam and also to the Lord in Upper Ahobalam.³⁹

These inscriptions categorically state that neivedhyam should be offered twice i.e. at mid day and evening to the Lord as well as Sri Bhashyakara in the temple.

HYMNOLOGY:

Thirumangai Alvar is the only Alvar who has done mangalasasanam to the Perumal here. He has composed ten pasurams in praise of this Lord. The pasurams along with their meaning is given below:

PASURAM NO. 1008

அங்கண் ஞாலம் அஞ்ச அங்குல ராளரியாய்
 அபுணன்
 பொங்க ஆகம் வள்ளுகிரால் போழ்ந்த புனிதனிடம்
 பைங்க னுனைக் கொம்பு கொண்டு
 பத்திமையால் அடிக்கீழ்ச்
 செங்க னுனி இட்டிறைஞ்சும் சிங்க வேள் குன்றமே.

³⁷ *ibid* Serial No. 86

³⁸ *History of the Cult of Narasimha in Andhra Pradesh* by Dr. Madaboosani Narasimhacharya page 221.

³⁹ *History of the Cult of Narasimha in Andhra Pradesh* by Dr. Madaboosani Narasimhacharya page 221.

Meaning:

When the asura king Hiranya Kasipu asked the child devotee Prahlada whether his Lord Vishnu was in the pillar nearby, immediately, You assumed the man-beast form (Narasimha) and emerged from that pillar and struck fear in the minds of those living in this vast world. Seeing the incomparable man-beast form before him, Hiranya Kasipu the asura got angry and got ready to fight. At that time, You tore open his chest with Your sharp finger nails. The place where that Parisuddha Perumal resides is Singavel kunram. In that place, the red eyed lions break the tusks from the beautiful eyed elephants and offer the tusks with reverence and devotion at the feet of Bhagavan.

PASURAM NO. 1009

அலைத்த பேழ்வாய் வாளெயிறோர்

கோளரியாய் அபுணன்

கொலைக்கை யாளன் நெஞ்சிடந்த கூருகி ராளனிடம்
மலைத்த செல்சாத் தெறிந்தபூசல் வந்துடி

வாய்கடுப்ப

சிலைக்கை வேடர் தெழிப்பறாத சிங்கவேள் குன்றமே.

Meaning:

Singavel kunram is the place where Lord Narasimha who has sharp finger nails and Who in His angry mood has opened His mouth wide and is rotating the tongue from one side to the other, resides. He has shining teeth. He is incomparable and has an aura of fierce dignity and haughtiness. It was He, Who tore open the chest of Hiranya Kasipu, notorious for thoughtless killing of all living things. The hunters living in that place look at the pilgrims who have come to visit that place and fight with them as they are entering their territory. The beating of the drums and the noise of the bow held by the hunters in their hands are always heard in Singavel kunram.

The Alvar makes it clear that Ahobilam is full of tribals who fight with the pilgrims who enter the temple town. He is conveying the idea that it is a divya desa filled with dangers.

PASURAM NO. 1010

ஏய்ந்த பேழ்வாய் வாளெயிற்றோர் கோளரியாய்
 அவுணன்
 வாய்ந்த ஆகம் வள்ளுகிரால் வகிர்ந்தஅம்
 மானதிடம்
 ஓய்ந்த மாவும் உடைந்தகுன்றும் அன்றியும் நின்று
 அமுலால்
 தேய்ந்த வேயு மல்லதில்லாச் சிங்கவேள்குன்றமே.

Meaning:

Singavel kunram is the place where Narasimha Swami with His big mouth, spear like sharp teeth assumed the incomparable form of man-beast avatara and with His sharp finger nails tore and threw out the intestines of Hiranyan, the asura. There is nothing else in that place other than hillocks made up of broken stones, burnt stumps of bamboo plants and wild animals looking tired after having roamed about a lot.

The alvar makes it clear that due to the excessive heat in that area, the bamboo plants have got dried up and even the wild animals have to roam about a lot to satisfy their hunger and the constant roaming in the hostile surroundings, the Alvar says, has made even the animals look tired. He thus gives a beautiful pen picture of natural hostile environment in the divya desa.

PASURAM NO.1011

எவ்வம் வெவ்வேல் பொன்பெயரோன் ஏதல
 ளின்னுயிரை
 வவ்வி ஆகம் வள்ளுகிரால் வகிர்ந்தஅம் மானதிடம்
 கவ்வு நாயும் கழுகும் உச்சிப் போதொடு
 கால் சுழன்று
 தெய்வ மல்லால் செல்ல வொண்ணாச் சிங்கவேள்
 குன்றமே.

Meaning:

Singavel kunram is the place where Lord Narasimha who tore with His sharp nails the body of Hiranya Kasipu and robbed

him of his life resides. That Hiranya Kasipu was the enemy of Bhagavathars (pious people) and held in his hand the spear which was the cause for untold misery to many. That Singavel kunram is full of vultures and fierce forest dogs who try to bite those who enter the town. In that place, during the summer fierce hot wind blows. The atmosphere is so hostile anyone other than a deva cannot enter the place.

PASURAM NO. 1012

மென்ற பேழ்வாய் வாளெயிற்றோர் கோளரியாய்

அவுணன்

பொன்ற ஆகம் வள்ளுகிரால் போழ்ந்த புனிதனிடம்

நின்ற செந்தீ மொண்டு சூறை நீள்விசும் பூடரிய

சென்று காண்டற் கரியகோயில் சிங்கவேள் குன்றமே.

Meaning:

Singavel Kunram is the place where fierce whirl wind like hot air blows eternally. When the wind blows, the hot flames sweep up to the sky and spread over the entire area and thus makes it impossible to go near the temple and worship the Lord. In that Singavel Kunram resides Lord Narasimha with sharp spear like teeth and Who in His anger is seen biting His teeth and swirling His tongue in anger from one side of His big mouth to the other. He assumed in comparable haughty man-beast form, on seeing which fierce form, Hiranya Kasipu was as good as dead. It is that Lord who with His sharp nails split open the body of Hiranya Kasipu, the asura.

PASURAM NO. 1013

எரிந்த பைங்க ணிலங்கு பேழ்வாய் எயிற்றோடு

இது எவ்வுருவென்று

இரிந்து வானோர் கலங்கியோட இருந்தஅம்

மானதிடம்

நெரிந்த வேயிள் முழையுள் நின்று நீள்நெறி

வாய் உழுவை

திரிந்த ஆனைச் சுவடு பார்க்கும் சிங்க வேள்

குன்றமே.

Meaning:

Singavel kunram is the place where the Perumal in His man-beast form with His sharp eyes reddened with anger and His wide open mouth full of teeth, made even the devas who looked at this fierce form run helter skelter out of sheer fear. The Singavel kunram is full of tigers which emerge out of the bamboo groves and follow the trail left by the feet of the elephants.

The Alvar very clearly presents the hostile atmosphere in this place filled with tigers and elephants and how even the devas were confused on seeing the fierce Narasimha avatara.

PASURAM NO. 1014

முனைத்த சேற்றம் விண்குடப் போய் மூவுல
கும்பிறவும்
அனைத்தும் அஞ்ச ஆளரியாய் இருந்தாம்
மானதிடம்
கனைத்த தீயும் கல்லுமல்லா வில்லுடை வேடருமாய்
தினைத்த னையும் செல்ல வொண்ணஞ்ச
சிங்க வேள் குன்றமே.

Meaning:

In Singavel kunram where the Lord resides, when the fierce fire burns it produces a crackling noise. The stones caught in that fire burst due to excessive heat. The place is full of fierce hunters the likes of whom cannot be seen anywhere else in the world. This entire hostile atmosphere makes it impossible to even go near the place for a second. In that Singavel kunram resides Lord Narasimha Whose fierce anger grew till it almost reached the sky and burnt it. The entire world looked at that form and trembled with fear.

The Alvar paints a picture that the anger of Narasimha made the people fear that the time for sarvaloca sambhara had neared. The Narasimha is therefore seen in such an ugra form.

PASURAM NO. 1015

நாத்த மும்ப நான்முகனும் ஈசனு மாய் முறையால்
ஏத்த அங்கு ராளரியாய இருந்ததும் மாளதிடம்
காய்த்த வாகை நெற்று ஒலிப்பக் கல்லதர்

வேயங்கழைபோய்

தேய்த்த தீயால் விண்சிவக்கும் சிங்கவேள் குன்றமே.

Meaning:

The Lord is seen as the incomparable Narasimha in Singavel kunram. Brahma and Siva have joined together and are offering prayers to this Lord. Their constant incessant stothra i.e. praise of the Lord, has almost thickened their tongue due to constant use. In Singavel kunram one can hear the noise of bursting open of the dried fruits of the Vagai trees (a particular type of forest tree). The tall bamboo trees in the place raze against each other and cause fire which makes the entire sky look red.

The Alvar in this pasuram also describes the frightening sights and scenes in Ahobalam. The fruits bursting open make the noise, the bamboos cause fire whose flames reach the sky and Brahma and Siva are singing the praise of this Lord to calm Him down.

PASURAM NO. 1016

நல்லை நெஞ்சே! நாம் தொழுதும் நம்முடை

நம்பெருமாள்

அல்லி மாதர் புல்க நின்ற ஆயிரந் தோளனிடம்
நெல்லி மல்கிக் கல்லுடைப்பப் புல்லிலை யார்த்து

அதர்வாய்ச்

சில்லு சில்லென் றெல்லறாத சிங்கவேள் குன்றமே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram, the Alvar makes a complete turn around. Having so far described the horrors of the hill in eight pasurams, in this pasuram he says, O Mind, do not get worried. Our Perumal is staying in that place along with Mahalakshmi. Only the asuras and the enemies should worry, not the devotees. He

tells the devotees that one need not get frightened by the events that occur in the hill or get upset with the fierce angry mood displayed by the man-beast avataram. The Lord there is Sarva rakshaka and as He is with Mahalakshmi, He will definitely protect us.

Freely translated this pasuram says, O Mind! you are a very good person. Our Lord is seen here embracing Peria Piratti (Mahalakshmi). In this place, He looks as if He has thousand shoulders. This place is full of gooseberry trees whose tender roots have spread into the hard stones and has split even the hard stone. The leaves of the palm tree waving in the breeze produce a rattling dry noise. It appears as if the bettles (suvar kozhi) in Tamil and gillicca in Sanskrit) are making the noise which sounds like "chill". This noise reverbrates all over Singavel kunram.

In this pasuram, the Alvar says that the Lord appears as if He has got thousand shoulders. May be it is because He is happy at being with Thayar. As such it appears as if He has got many shoulders.

PASURAM NO. 1017

செங்க ன்னளி இட்டிறைஞ்சும் சிங்கவேள்

குன்றுடைய

எங்க ளீச னெம்பிரானை இருந்தமிழ் நூற்புலவன்
மங்கை யாளன் மன்னு தொல் சேர் வண்டறை

தார்க் கலியன்

செங்கையாளன் செஞ்சொல்மாலை வல்லவர்

தீதிலரே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram the last line of the first pasuram i.e. 1008 becomes the first line of this pasuram. The Alvar says in Singavel kunram the red eyed lion places with reverence at the divine feet of the Lord whatever prey it has killed. The Perumal Who resides in Singavel kunram is our master. He is our Saviour. This paamalai (string of verses) full of sweet thoughts have been written by Thirumangai Alvar, the great Sri Vaishnavite, the

cheftain of Thirumangai Nadu and the great Tamil scholar. He is wearing a flower garland from which the bees are still sucking the honey. Whoever reads these ten pasurams will be rid of all their sins and all their problems will get resolved. God will bless them.

This pasuram is therefore a phala stuthi pasuram. The Alvar says that the lion placed at the divine feet the prey that it had killed as its offering. It will be interesting to relate here that Gantakarna who was a great Shiva bhaktha used to eat corpses. One day he got a brahmin corpse. It is said that he offered it to Shiva and said "Navam savam (a new fresh corpse), idham punya (it is a corpse which has done a lot of punya, vedha paraga (it is the corpse of a veda parayanadar) yagna seela (the corpse is that of a person who did yagnas); maha pragnya (it is the corpse of a gnani), Brahmana (it is the corpse of a brahmin) Sivam (it is holy - mangalakaram) uthana (it is eminently fit i.e. shreshta). Thus the man who eats the corpse offered to the Lord the best of such corpses. Similarly, the lion, says the alvar, offers to the God the prey it has killed.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108 Tirupati Andaadhi

Poem No. 97

வாழ்குமரன் மேற்கன கவஞ்சகன் மேலோர் முகத்தே
சூழ் சுருணையும் முனிவுந் தோன்றியவாற் -

கேழ்கினரு

மங்கவேள் குன்றவழல் சரபத்தைப் பிளந்த

சிங்கவேள் குன்றத்தினார்க்கு.

Meaning:

'The Perumal in Singavel kunram (Narasimha hillock) is the one Who destroyed Sarabham which is close to Lord Shiva Who opened His third eye and burnt to ashes the beautiful body of Manmadha. It is indeed very intriguing and surprising as to how the eyes of the Singavel kunram Perumal could, at the same time, shower grace and love on the child devotee Prahlada and cast a glance of hatred and anger on the evil treacherous Hiranyan.

N.B.: In this poen Divyakavi wonders as to how the same organ viz., eye could convey at the same time two opposite qualities viz., love and hatred. Sarabham is a mixture of a bird and an animal. It has two heads, a pair of wings, eight feet with sharp nails, eyes which look upwards. Some say it is bird, others that it is an animal. It is believed to kill lion with ease. But here because the lion is Lord, He kills with ease this sarabham - says the poet.

* * *

VAIKUNTHA

This is a divya desam which is not in this world. This is the place to which every vaishnavite would like to go on attaining moksha. This is varyingly referred to as Tiru Nadu, Thiru Paramapada and Paramakasam. It is said that the people staying in this Paramapada i.e. the muktatmas will look like God in their physical attributes. They will be spending all the time rendering service to God (kainkaryam).

Perumal who presides over this divya desa is known as Paramathanathan. He is seen in a sitting posture facing south. The thayar is known as Peria Pirattiar. The theerthas here are Viraja nadhi and Iramadha pushkarini. The vimana under which God is seated is known as Anantanga vimana.

As stated earlier, no muktatma who goes to Paramapada ever returns to tell us what the place looks like. However, there are various religious literature and pasurams sung by the Alvars which enable us to get an idea of this place. In this chapter, I propose to briefly describe Vaikuntha as related by Nammalwar in his "Soozh visumbu adimukil" and by Pillai Lokacharyar in "Archi radhi gathi" and by Ramanuja in "Vaikunta gadyam" and by Kooratalwan in "Vaikunta stavam", and as related by Brahma in Bhagavatha. Here I would like to publicly acknowledge my deep debt of gratitude to my teacher Pillai lokam Siromani Sthalasayanathuraiyar Swamigal who spared no pains in explaining these original works to me. Whatever I say in the following paragraphs is therefore what I have learnt at the feet of my teacher by reading these original texts.

"Soozh Visumbu Adimukil" by Nammalwar

Let us first see Vaikuntha through Nammalwar's eyes.

The Jiva has to first have para bhakti, then para gnana and finally parama bhakti and only then can attain salvation or moksha. Nammalwar the vaishnavite saint visited Thirumoghur and prayed to Kalamega Perumal to give him moksha. It is believed that God personally accompanied this great athma

to Vaikuntha. God would turn His head every now and then to ensure that Nammalwar's soul was following. Nammalwar has described the beauty of Kalamega Perumal in one of his pasurams and it is said that the vision that he had of that Perumal was gathered from what he saw whenever Perumal turned His head to ensure that the alvar was following Him to Vaikunta! The ten pasurams covered by Soozh Visumbu adimukil is Nammalwar's vision of Vaikuntha. The great vaishnavite sage in these ten pasurams paints his "Manaseeka Anubhavam" of Vaikuntha.

PASURAM NO.3755

சூழ்விசும் பணிமுகில் தூரியம் முழக்கின
ஆழ்கட லலைதிரை கையெடுத்த தாடின
எழ்பொழி லும்வள மேந்திய என்னப்பன்
வாழ்புகழ் நாரணன் தமரைக்கண் டுகந்தே.

In this particular pasuram, Nammalwar says that the clouds which had encircled the sky were trumpetting in joy when the mukthaatma reached Paramapada (here Nammalwar). He says it was as if the waves in the deep ocean were rising high and waving their hands in joy at the journey of this mukthathma. Thus, the clouds and the waves in the ocean were expressing their joy and happiness at a sincere devotees (adiyar) of their master and lord the Perumal having attained moksha.

PASURAM NO.3756

நாரணன் தமரைக்கண் டுகந்துதல் நீர்முகில்
பூரண பொற்குடம் பூரித்தது உயர்விண்ணில்
நீரணி கடல்கள்நின் றூர்த்தன நெடுவரைத்
தோரணம் நிரைத்துஎங்கும் தொழுதன ருலகே.

In this pasuram Nammalwar says that the sight of the thick clusters of clouds looked as if they were lined up to give poorna kumbha to this "adiyar" i.e. servant of God. "Poorna Kumbha" is a ceremonial welcome given to an important person. The lashing of the waves in the ocean were raising a noise as if they were clapping their hands. People had tied arches made of mango leaves (thorana) and were bending their head and doing namaskaram to the soul of Nammalwar on its journey to Vaikuntha.

PASURAM NO.3757

தொழுதனர் உலகர்கள் துரபநல் மலர் மழை
 பொழிவனர் பூமியன் றளந்தவன் தமர்முன்னே
 எழுமினென்று இருருமங் கிசைத்தனர் முனிவர்கள்
 வழியிது வைகுந்தற்கு என்ருவந்து எதிரே.

In this pasuram he says that the rishis and other mukthatmas in Vaikuntha showered flower petals on Nammalwar's soul saying that he was the servant of Perumal who had taken avatar as Thrivikrama. They also offer dhoopa. "Dhoopa" refers to the sprinkling of sambirani and other scented powder on live coal held in a receptacle. The smoke that emanates will be sweet smelling. Some of the rishis were heard loudly asking the people residing in Vaikuntha to stand up. They were trying to discipline and introduce some order amongst the residents of Vaikuntha who were apparently excitedly jostling and surging forward to welcome the great new entrant i.e. the atma of Nammalwar. The rishis were also seen pointing the pathway to Vaikuntha lest he should miss his way to Vaikuntha.

PASURAM NO.3758

எதிரெதிர் இமையவர் இருப்பிடம் வகுத்தனர்
 கதிரவர ரவரவர் கைந்நிரை காட்டினர்
 அதிர்குரல் முரசங்கள் அலைகடல் முழக்கொத்த
 மதுவிரி துழாய்முடி மாதவன் தமர்க்கே.

In this pasuram the alvar says that the devas had made arrangements for the stay of this muktatma at various places enroute to Vaikuntha as this muktatma was an "adiyar" of Madhava. The Ekadasa Rudrars also paid their obsequence to the soul of this great muktatma. The sound of the drum beats sounded to welcome him were like the sound of waves of the ocean.

PASURAM NO.3759

மாதவன் தமரென்று வாசலில் வாணவர்
 போதுமின் எமதிடம் புகுதுக ஷென்றலும்
 கீதங்கள் பாடினர் கின்னரர் கெருடர்கள்
 வேதநல் வாயவர் வேள்வியுள் மடுத்தே.

In this pasuram the alvar says that as the great soul of an "Adiyar" (Sincere devotee) of Madhava was ascending the devas stood in front of their residences and requested that great soul to step into their houses. The vedic scholars were reciting the vedas. The kinnaras and Gandharvas were singing a song of welcome.

PASURAM NO.3760

வேள்வியுள் மடுத்தலும் விரைகமழ் நறும்பகை
காளங்கள் வலம்புரி கலந்துளங்கும் இசைத்தனர்
ஆண்மின்கள் வானகம் ஆழியான் தமர்என்று
வாளொண்கண் மடந்தையர் வாழ்த்தினர் மகிழ்ந்தே.

In this pasuram the alvar says homams (sacrificial prayers) were being offered in many places as a welcome offering. The scented smoke arising out of that sacred fire had spread all over like a canopy. People residing in Paramapada played on conches (shanku) and kalangal (a type of musical instrument) and other musical instruments. Goddesses blessed this muktatma and asked him to rule over Paramapada.

PASURAM NO.3761

மடந்தையர் வாழ்த்தலும் மருதரும் வசுக்களும்
தொடர்ந்துளங்கும் தோத்திரம் சொல்லினர்
தொடுகடல்
கிடந்தஎங் கேசவன் கிளரொளி மணிமுடி
குடந்தைஎங் கோவலன் குடியடி யார்க்கே.

In this pasuram the alvar says that throughout the route he was accompanied by pious women who blessed him and said that he was a sincere devotee (adiyar) of Thirukundanthai Perumal. The Maruthars (similar to devas) Astavasus were repeating the stothrams while accompanying this great soul.

PASURAM NO.3762

குடியடி யார்இவர் கோவினதன் தக்கென்று
முடியுடை வானவர் முறைமுனெ எதிர்கொள்ள
கொடியணி நெடுமதிள் கோபுரம் குறுகினர்
வடியுடை மாதவன் வைகுந்தம் புகவே.

In this pasuram the Alvar says that as the soul neared Paramapada, the leaders amongst the devas welcomed him. The soul crossed the high rampart walls and reached the gopura vasal i.e. temple tower entrance to Vaikuntha.

PASURAM NO.3763

வைகுந்தம் புகுதலும் வாசலில் வானவர்
வைகுந்தன் தமர்எமர் எமதிடம் புகுதென்று
வைகுந்தத்து அமரரும் முனிவரும் வியத்தனர்
வைகுந்தம் புகுவது மண்ணவர் விதியே

At the entrance of Vaikuntha, the nitya suris welcomed this great soul, Bhagavan's servant (adiyar) to their places of residence. Even as they uttered words of welcome, the amarars, munivars (i.e. bhakti nishtars and kainkarya nishtars) said that only the sincere devotees of Perumal can ever enter Paramapada.

PASURAM NO.3764

விதிவகை புகுந்தன ரென்றுநல் வேதிமர்
பதியினில் பாங்கினில் பாதங்கள் கழுலினர்
நிதியும்நற் சுண்ணமும் நிறைகுட விளக்கமும்
மதிமுக மடந்தையர் ஏந்தினர் வந்தே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram, the alvar says that his soul reached Paramapada, the vedic scholars offered Sripadha theertham to him. The divine damsels welcomed him with kuda vilakku (lamps) in their hands. Even as the soul entered Thirumamani mandapam, it could see the happy atmosphere prevailing in that place with God surrounded by His sincere devotees. The Almighty then invited this new entrant i.e. the soul of muktatma viz.Nammalwar to join that group and thus admitted him into paramapada. Such was the glorious journey of the muktatma to Vaikuntha.

ARCHI RADHI GATHI:

Let us now turn to look at Vaikuntha as detailed in Archi-radhi gathi of Sri Pillai Lokacharya:-

An attempt is made in the following pages to translate into english the lines (word for word) in this book (Archiradhi gathi)

Pillai Lokacharya wrote 18 rahasyams i.e. books expounding the fundamental vaishnavite philosophy and shastras. The Archiradhi gathi is one such rahasya. The other 17 rahasyas are as follows:

Mumukshu padi
 Thathvatrayam
 Arthapanchakam
 Srivachana pooshanam
 Prameya sekaram
 Prapanna Parithranam
 Sara Sangraham
 Samsara samrajyam
 Navarathna malai
 Nava vidha sambandam
 Yudruchikka padi
 Parandapadi
 Sriyaṇṇu padi
 Tatvasekaram
 Tani dwayam
 Tani charamam
 Tani pranavam

It is believed that there are four ways or paths to attain moksha. They are :

- (i) Garbhagathi
- (ii) Yama gathi
- (iii) Dhooma gathi
- (iv) Archiradhi gathi

The first three paths are for ordinary, sinful mortals where the soul has to go through Narakanubhavam i.e. hell before attaining moksha, if at all it is blessed as to attain moksha. Archiradhi gathi however describes the path to moksha exclusively reserved for mumukshus i.e. great souls. "Archiradhi" means:

a praiseworthy, "gathi" means the path to paramapada. Archiradhi gathi has four prakaranas i.e. chapters. This describes, as stated earlier, the path taken by a muktatma i.e. a gnani, while attaining moksha. More or less the description given here of the route to Vaikuntha compares with what Nammalwar described in his Soozh visumbu adi.

The archiradhi gathi is written in manipravala style i.e. a mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil. As stated earlier, thanks to my teacher I read through the book and what follows is an attempt to present in simple English what is written in that great rahasya.

Lakshminayakan, the rahasya says is the master of the entire world. The world consists of nitya vibhooti and leela vibhooti. Nitya vibhooti is Paramapada. The rest of the world is leela vibhooti. The people living in the nitya vibhooti are also referred to as those residing in Bogha vibhooti that is to say, they are staying in Paramapada enjoying the company of Baghavan. They are under the suzerainty of Baghavan Who rules them seated under a white umbrella. That is to say God is the sole monarch in Paramapada. He is the ultimate and only master. The use of the words "Ekatha pathram" i.e. a white umbrella is used to denote the usual insignia of a king. In other words, it refers to Eka Chatradhipatyam or sweta chatradhipatyam.

Those who are staying in leela vibhooti are in direct contrast to the lucky residents of Paramapada. Unlike the people in Paramapada those living in leela vibhooti are not accustomed to implicit obedience of orders. While those in Paramapada would bend their heads out of respect before the sincere devotees of Perumal, those in leela vibhooti will behave in the exact opposite manner and will show scant respect for the pious devotees. Instead each and everyone of them claim that they are the master. Having made the tall claim that they are the masters, they think that all the things in the world belong to them. While those in Paramapada worship only one God i.e. Narayana as the Supreme Lord, in sharp contrast those living in leela vibhooti sing the praises of any number of gods. In short, people in Leela

vibhooti suffer from "ahamkara" and "mamakara" i.e. from the illnesses of arrogance and attachment.

It is said that the behaviour of the people in leela vibhooti will be as follows:

Unlike the people in Paramapada these residents will lay claim to fame or name. They are not intelligent. Unlike those in Paramapada whose body has a shining glow of purity, those living in leela vibhooti have a sinful body. While those in Paramapada will be praised by the devas as great souls and will always have the sole objective of doing kainkarya i.e. service to God, not so much to please themselves as to please Him, those in leela vibhooti do not know what it is to render service to God. Instead, they become the slaves of Manmadha and run behind sensual pleasures. They do not realise that God is the one and only whole truth. They do not bow down before the Perumal who holds the chakra and the shanku in His hand. Instead they follow the path dictated by their bodily pleasures. Instead of saying that their sole objective and purpose in life is to attain God, they find various methods to get separated from God and to go far away from God. They escape the long reach of the benign helpful hands of Bhagavan. They get lost in the evanescent pleasures of the world and go far away from the grace of the God.

The above is the description of the people residing in the leela vibhooti as given by Sri Pillai Lokacharya in his book. It is painful and amazing that this description of the world given so long ago should hold good even today.

Pillai Lokacharya says that God sees this sorry state of affairs of people living in leela vibhooti. He does not throw up His hands and give up hope. He does not also leave them to their fate. As He is associated with them ever since the origin of Creation He thinks of ways and means of correcting and salvaging these erring souls which have taken the wrong path. He, Who, is the friend, philosopher, guide and protector of the entire creation is ever busy in trying to rescue these pitiable souls. He makes them realise the ills of this world. He

with His abundant grace blesses these poor souls. Ever since His *kataksha* rests on them, these poor souls start raving for salvation. They learn the beauty of *advasha* (universal love). They adopt *vairagya*. They are blessed with *gnana* and *viveka*. They seek a good *acharya* and with his help want to be initiated into doing *kainkarya* (service) to the Lord. The futility of this life with its ills, hits them in the eye. They realise that life in this world is comparable to the life of a helpless frog caught in the mouth of a snake. They understand they are like a doe caught in a forest fire running hither and thither not knowing where safety lies. They realise their fate is none better than that of a helpless ant caught between the two ends of a burning stick. They are like a rudder less ship tossed about in the turbulent waters of the sea. They realise they are torn asunder by the five senses.

Similar thoughts were expressed by Thirumangai alvar in his *Peria Thirumozhi* (Pasuram 2022). Thirumangai alvar as is well known was a chieftain. He had therefore enjoyed the pleasures of a king. In this *pasuram*, he is seeking *moksha* from God. While addressing God he cries out of the depths of his heart that he is like a tree on the bank of a river which runs the risk of being washed away during heavy floods. He says he is like a person who rushed to the roof top to escape from the swirling flood waters only to find that he had to share that haven with a vicious snake! He compares himself to a frightened ant caught on a piece of wood which is burning furiously at both ends. He adds he is like a fox which is caught in a flood in the forest. He says he is worried to distraction and seeks the help of God to rescue him from this world and confer *moksha*.

Similar thoughts are expressed by Pillai Lokacharya while describing the thoughts of a reformed enlightened soul of *leela vibhooti*. With God's *kataksha* when enlightenment dawns, the poor soul hates his surroundings. His feeling of distaste to the life in this world is similar to the feeling of revulsion that Sita Devi had when in *Ashoka vana* she was surrounded by the despicable demonesses. They realise the folly in pursuing good clothes and good food. They are able to clearly understand that life is not permanent as they thought and that is only a *maya*

and short lived ephemeral glory. The realisation makes them turn a new leaf.

Having turned a new leaf, the individual devotee is impatient. He is looking forward to the day when he will be emancipated and blessed with salvation. He will be looking forward to the day when he could attain the divine lotus feet of the Perumal. Every day's delay makes the hunger for attaining the Lord more severe. As he is not able to see God, each day looks like thousand pralaya kalam. The eye sight and the powers of speech get weakened. He looks forward only to the day when he can give up his mortal coils. Such is his impatience and eagerness to reach God.

From the day the person changed his habits and started directing his thoughts towards God, God became ever more keen to rescue him. Even as the devotee started showing scant respect to his body and wanted to shed the mortal coils and looks at God and says that he will not leave Him till such time as he attains Him, that is to say he reaches the stage of parama bhakti and wants to give up his body as he feels that the body is the cause for all the sins, Perumal tries to teach patience to him and impresses upon him that the same body which he hates can be made to adopt practices which will take him towards salvation. The devotee adopts saranagathi from that day. The devotee bends his head in veneration and devotion so as to reach the divine feet of the Lord. The God takes it as His prime task to see that the devotee attains his objective. All the time, God is thinking as to how He could help this devotee who is striving to attain salvation. He realises that with enlightenment the devotee is having a body which is as harmless as a snake from whom the venom has been taken out. Yet the devotee is mortally afraid that as long as he had got a body and there is aprakruti sambanda, it is possible that he may commit sins. God realises these fears of the devotee and tries to guide him in the proper path so as to attain moksha.

It is said that if the thirst of the devotee for attaining salvation occupies an area as big as the area covered by the hoof of a cow, the desire and affection of God to see that this soul

which is thirsting for salvation attains his objective, covers an area which is as big as the ocean! Thus God is more keen to take this reformed soul to Paramapada. In brief it means that if the individual devotee takes atleast the first small step towards attaining salvation, God extends the helping hand to enable the giant leap to Moksha. The thirst of God for ensuring that this soul attains salvation is more than the thirst of the individual soul to attain moksha. Even as the devotee wants to reach God, God also wants to help this reformed person and make him come to Paramapada.

The overwhelming desire of God to extend His hand in assistance and support to the soul which strives to attain salvation is also reflected in a pasuram of Nammalwar (Pasuram No.3621). In that pasuram, Nammalwar says that he wanted to enjoy and attain (anubhavam) the Lord. But he found to his dismay that Kaat Karai Appan (This is the Perumal in one of the divyadesas in Kerala) was a more tough master and He, before Nammalwar could attain Him, succeeded in ensuring that he completely absorbed Nammalwar. He says that Baghavan won in that race and so Kaatkarai Appan was a "kodiyan" i.e. a more capable person than the devotee himself.

The affectionate anxiety and desire of Perumal to see that this reformed soul reaches Paramapada is compared to the feeling that Dasaratha the emperor had when he wanted to celebrate the pattabhisheka of Rama and had invited Vasishta, Vamadeva and other rishis, in order to advise him on the plan of action for performing the pattabhisheka. Similarly, it is said that God calls the devas staying in Paramapada and requests them to accompany this chetanan i.e. devotee seeking salvation to Paramapada. The entire route to Paramapada is beautified. The streets and the houses enroute are also beautified. Perumal ensures that the punya i.e. the good done by this soul i.e. chethanan is made much of. He ensures that from the day the enlightenment has dawned in the mind of the soul, he controls kama, krodha and other ills. Perumal also ensures that the sin that the soul had committed in its earlier days due to ignorance, as also the sins that he may commit as long as the soul is attached to the mortal coil, gets reduced in its impact. While describing the manner

in which God reduces the burden of the sin and increases the content of the punya done by the soul which is striving to attain Paramapada, the author compares it to the situation when Rama let loose the arrow meant for Samudra raja on the enemies of Samudra Raja. This is a story in Ramayana when Rama was waiting to cross the ocean to reach Lanka. He spent three days on the banks of the ocean. But He found that Samudra Raja did not come and meet Him as requested. He got angry. He was about to let loose an arrow saying that he would completely dry up the ocean itself. Coming to know of this, Samudra raja along with his wife came and fell at the feet of Lord Rama and sought saranagathi. He said that He who created the ocean could not also be the person who destroys it. The moment Samudra raja along with his wife sought saranagathi at the feet of the Lord, the Lord calmed down. It is said that the arrow which He had kept ready to let loose on Samudra raja was, at the behest of Samudra Raja let loose on the demons who were residing in a particular island in the ocean and causing trouble to Samudra Raja. Thus, the arrow meant to destroy Samudra Raja was diverted to destroy the enemies of Samudra raja. Similarly the author says that the moment we seek saranagathi at the feet of the God, He will ensure that our enemies get killed and that our punya gets multiplied so as to enable attainment of salvation. God thus helps a great deal in giving a push to the soul which is striving to have swarga anubhava.

It is said that God seated on Garuda appears before this chetanan. At that time, Perumal looks like a blue cloud on an effulgent golden coloured mountain. The devotee has the anubhava i.e. the enjoyment of this Thirumeni of Perumal i.e. beautiful divine sight of His glorious figure. Perumal then calls the baghavath kankarya parars i.e. those doing service to Him and asks them to welcome this chethanan. With God's blessing this "bashya karananas" of the devotee gets merged with the "antah karanas" of the devotee. The speech gets submerged to the mind, and in turn the mind becomes a part of prana and prana becomes part of tejas. The soul which is striving to become one with God, is desirous of staying near paramatma even as a weary traveller who has suffered due to the heat of the harsh blazing Sun heaves a sigh of relief on reaching the shade of a

tree. This chethanan heaves a sigh of relief as soon as he reaches the protective ambit of the eternal truth viz. Vasudeva and is able to forget all the troubles and turmoils that he underwent in his life.

Thus, God has appeared before the soul and now starts the journey to Paramapada. The path through which the Perumal guides this soul to Paramapada is the archiraja path. Enroute the soul has for food the Dwayamantra. The God Who is guiding him in this path is Azhagiya Manavalan. (The beautiful Lord Ranganatha) The journey is long. The soul is able to relax and get over its tiredness by stopping on the banks of the river Viraja, or under the shade of kalpaka viruksha. The place which will be ultimately reached by this soul is Tirumamani mandapa. The people who are accompanying this good soul are the archiraji purushas. The sound made by the clouds in the sky is the prayana vadya i.e. the welcome music. While starting on the journey Devadi deva who is antaryamin in all of us shows the path.

The soul has to cross all the andas; 14 lokas constitute one anda. Only after crossing all these can the soul reach Perumal and see Him Who has eyes like that of lotus flowers, Whose mouth is red like a ripe fruit and Who look like a dark cloud (kala megam) and Who has curly hair. That Azhagia Manavalan is the ultimate goal. It is said that as the soul starts on its journey it looks at the anda i.e. world which had held him as a captive for a long time. It looks at the world with relief as it has been able to shake off the shackles of that world and is on its way to Paramapada. The long felt desire to reach Paramapada swells with the passage of time, as well as in anticipation of reaching the end of the journey viz. attaining Paramapada.

The next few paragraphs describes the anticipatory pleasure derived by the soul on its onward journey. This pleasure is described to be similar to the one which Sita devi experienced when leaving Lanka to rejoin Rama after Ravana was defeated. It is said that around the heart there are 101 nadis. The antaryamin in this devotee is said to be happy that it is proceeding to deva loka. Its mind is clear with enlightenment. As the time

for shedding the mortal coils arrives, a light came to accompany the soul on its onward journey. The sira kapala i.e. top of the head breaks and thereby the Moordhanya nadi which is located in the mid head escapes, joins with the antaryamin and starts on its onward journey. It followed the Surya kirana i.e. the Sun's rays. It got on to a chariot known as Om. The mind was driving the chariot. As it was travelling in the chariot the antaryamin saw that the brilliance caused by the chakra of God held in His hands gave a certain brightness to all the things. The world itself looked different. When the soul started on its journey the ocean is said to have danced. The churning of the waves brought mud from the depths of the ocean to the top. It was as if the ocean was dancing in excitement (sasambrahma nruttam). The lashing of the waves provided the background music for the dance. The people living in the other worlds came to offer welcome (satkaram). The entire route was beautified with thorana i.e. welcome arches. The entire akasa was said to be full of clouds and gave an appearance as if poorna kumbha was being offered to the soul. Scented dhoopa filled the air. It rained flowers. The devas were vying with each other inviting this great soul to visit their residences. Divine music reverberated in the entire area. All the people residing enroute brought all their wealth to offer to this liberated soul. Some sang songs. Some performed yagas, offered the punya which accrued through those yagas to this soul. Some others offered prayers. Some others sounded the thiru chinnam i.e. bugle. Blowing of the shanku resounded all round. Damsels with beautiful eyes who were adi vahika patnis i.e. the wives of the devas welcomed this soul. Mangalasasana i.e. words of-praise were sung welcoming the soul to their world. The seven maruts and eight Vasus (they are devas) also showed the way to Paramapada to this soul. The people accompanying this soul were singing the stotras. Thus, this jeeva started its journey in the archi marga accompanied by the purushas who had already reached Paramapada.

This concludes the first chapter of archiradi gathi. The second chapter details the path to Paramapada. Let us now go through the details.

This chapter says that the soul which has started on its paramapada prayan first becomes bright like a Sun. Later Sukla praksha devata and Uttarayana devata, Samvatsara, Vayu devas accompany and show the route to this soul. Later it breaks through Suryamandala and proceeds further. It is said that while passing through surya mandala, Sun God with his bright golden effulgence is seen riding in his chariot which has Time as its wheels (kala chakram). The Surya mandala is so bright that one cannot open one's eyes. This soul breaks through Surya mandala and then enters Chandra mandala, the abode of Lord Chandra who has the amrutham with him. Such a moon god also does upacharam to this soul. This Moon god is the master (thalaivan) of the Navagrahas, the 27 and other millions of stars and guides this soul through his land to the next part of the journey. Later Varuna devata and Indra who is looking after the three worlds also meet this soul which is traversing towards Paramapada. Next the soul crosses the world of Prajapathis who are the masters of Gandharvas, Yakshas and other rakshasas. Later it passes on to Brahmandam. 14 lokas constitute one anda and avarana is an area which is ten times an anda. The soul after having crossed brahmandam crosses the 17 avaranas. These avaranas are like roof over each anda. Finally, it is heading towards Moolaprakruti.

At that stage of the description of the roof, the author describes what are all the sufferings in the Yama dhootha world which was avoided by the soul which is going through the Archiradhi gathi. In short, having described the joy and the happenings and the welcome that awaited the soul which took the path of archiradhi gathi, the troubles and turmoils that await the soul which goes to hell because of its sins is described. It is a natural reaction of those who have had a safe sailing through this world, to value their problemless path more, by knowing what are the pitfalls which they have avoided in not having taken the other route! Perhaps, that explains why in this book which describes the path to Paramapada taken by the punyatmas, mention is also made of the path taken by sinners - which is to be avoided.

In the other path, there is no water neither is there any shade. The Yama dhoothas who act as the guides take one through a path where one hears weird noises which make one tremble with fear even as one hears the noise. The path is full of difficulties and ills. The Yama dhoothas with their pasa rope drag one in that path. The ties of mamakaram, thinking of the family, the wife and others makes the passage even more difficult. The path is long. The dogs enroute catch us. The weapons like sakti, shanku etc. are used to hurt a person. One becomes mince meat to the demons who are waiting like tigers to pounce upon their prey and have their fill. The body bleeds with the wounds. Hunger and thirst cause a lot of pain. The request to Yama dhoothas to give them food and water only meets with derisive laughter. The nose, the face, the lips, the teeth all get broken and hurt. The hands and the legs also get hurt. We are dragged along the path. This soul which is on its way to Paramapada thinks of what all it has avoided by not going to Yamaloka. It realises how the archiradhi gathi has ensured that it is met with open arms enroute by the devas. It is given due dignity. This description of the path to Yamaloka and the path to Paramapada reminds one of what the prince of Denmark in Shakespeare's drama "Hamlet" told his mother viz. "Look at this picture and that". It is said that coming to know of the difficulties that lie on the path to Yama loka this soul which is on its way to Paramapada is rushing even more speedily towards Paramapada. It is crossing the seven worlds. The author says that the quick pace at which this soul was rushing towards Paramapada was comparable to the speed with which the dimunitive dwarf Vamana assumed the viswaroopa. The soul is happy that it has escaped from the bonds of samsara. There are three types of tapatrayam i.e. difficulties in this world. They are Adyatmika, Adideivika and Adibouthika. Adyatmika refers to the pain that results from the sins committed by us. Adideivika refers to the pain that is caused by deiva vasam. Adibouthika refers to the pain that is caused by sheer existence in this world. All these three types of ills and consequential pains are like a forest fire, to escape from which is very difficult. The soul which is enroute to Paramapada has crossed all these hurdles when it reaches Viraja nadhi and has its dip in the river. (The river in heaven is known as Viraja nadhi while the river

in hell is known as Vaitharani). When the soul had a dip in Viraja nadhi it gets rid of all the bonds of samsara. Actually the word that is used in this book is that the soul which has the dip in the Viraja nadhi gets rid of "samsara setru" (Tamil) i.e. a Quagmire. These two words convey graphically the picture that the world is nothing but a pool of dirty liquid mud, almost a cesspool. After the dip in Viraja nadhi, the soul gets cleansed. It is almost as if till then the soul was like a Surya mandala covered by clouds or a chandra mandala which was caught in the net of Rahu or like a manikya i.e. a precious stone lying hidden in mud. Once the soul had its bath in Viraja nadhi, all the doshas i.e. defects are washed away. It gets the brightness as if many thousands of Suns have risen at the same time. The soul gets the brightness due to the purity.

As soon as the soul had a dip in Viraja nadhi and shed its rajo and thamo gunams, Vishnu dhoothas who look like Lord Vishnu, having four hands with bright faces (They are known as Amanavan i.e. opposite to Manavan) meet this liberated soul. They hold his hand and guide him on the path to Paramapada. By the touch of the amanavan this soul also gets transformed into a beautiful object. It is blessed with all kalyana gunas. It has only the sudha satva guna. Kainkaryadaras and the Nitya siddhas approach him. He is able to see Paramapada in the distance. He bends his head and offers worship to Paramapada. That Paramapada is not like Indra loka as Indra loka can be attained by performing Aswamedha yaga. But it can also be lost. But Paramapada is eternal. Paramapada can be attained only with the help of Baghavath preethi i.e. Grace of God. While people in Indra loka will have satva, raja and thamo gunas, those in param padam will have only satva guna. They have clear jnana. Paramapada has an aiswarya and wealth which cannot ever be measured. The soul sees that glorious land viz. Paramapada and bows down and offers namaskaram.

Amanavas, Nithyas, Mukhtas welcome this soul. The place is filled with the sound of shanku, Thiruchinnam (a type of bugle) and Bheri. As he is proceeding lost in enjoyment of these sights and scenes, 500 divya apsaras with divya choorna, divya vastra, divya anjana come to meet this soul. They in

turn beautify this soul in such a manner that Para brahma will enjoy the sight of their end product (Brahmalankaram). They beautify this soul with the vastra (raiment), Mala, etc. worn earlier by God. The beautifiers look at the beautified muktatma and enjoy along with him, his good luck in having been blessed with a place in paramapada.

Once all this beautification is over, Peria thiruvadi i.e. Garuda will bring the divya vimana. This vimana is covered with evergreen creepers and has as rows and rows of pearls hangings down from the top to the sides. Its top is covered with Merkattis (vithanam) i.e. the piece of cloth which is usually used as a roof over the head of the idol whenever it is taken out in a procession. A number of damsels from Paramapada are seated in the vimana. The muktatma then steps into the divya vimana. Stothras are sung. The vimana starts on its journey to Paramapada. Enroute it passes through beautiful groves and thick vegetation. Apsara sthrees welcome this vimana throughout its route. They offer the divya gandha, brahma gandha and other scented powders found only in Paramapada. Even as they carry these sweet scented articles, they themselves are said to radiate a sweet smell. The vimana finally nears the entrance of Paramapada. The divya gopura is sighted. The Thiruvasal Kappan i.e. the person standing guard at the entrance to Paramapada also welcomes this soul. Thus, the soul reaches Paramapada also known as Ayodhya and Aprajitha. It is known as Ayodhya as it is a place which cannot be attained by anybody by fighting a war! that is to say one has to earn through punya the right to enter Paramapada and not by mere brute might. The word "Aparajitha" also similarly conveys the thought that it is a place which cannot be conquered by anyone. Having reached such a Paramapada where the Perumal is residing, this muktatma utters the words "Sri Vaikunthaya Namaha" and offers obsequence to the Vaikuntha Vasal i.e. gateway.

As soon as the soul reaches Vaikuntha, the kainkaryaparas, the munis and other great souls are happily surprised that this soul caught in the web of samsara has atlast reached Vaikuntha, a task which is as difficult as water in the ocean successfully climbing up the hill! This soul tossed about in the ocean known as

Samsara has achieved a great feat in climbing up the Paramapada hill. Garuda, Visvaksena and others take this atma to their respective residences. They seat him on a high asana while they themselves squat on the ground. Their wives (patnis) brought water and washed the feet of this muktatma (Sree Pada theertha offering). They relate to their spouses the greatness of this muktatma and render upachara to that soul.

The atma is next welcomed by a number of divine damsels. They take him around the Raja veeadhis i.e. main streets in Vaikuntha. These damsels offer the Sri Sadagopa i.e. Satari, divya churna (scented articles) poorna kumbha, mangala dheepa etc. to this soul. The happiness felt by these ladies while welcoming this atma is akin to the happiness a mother experiences while welcoming her son who is returning after a long spell of stay away from her. The faces of those divine damsels looked cool and calm like the Moon God. Having traversed the main streets, the muktatma enters a swarna mandir. He again offers his obeisance, bows down his head and says "Sri Vaikuntaya Divya Vimanaya Namaha". When this good soul enters Vaikuntha, it is said the entire area became more green and fresh as if it had just received refreshing welcome showers. The whole of Vaikuntha is breathtakingly beautiful. The muktatma sights the punnai vriksham (This is a devadaru vruksha i.e. a tree to be found only in Vaikuntha) absolutely green as the entire tree is covered by fresh leaves. Different coloured flowers had blossomed all over. These flowers were something special to Vaikuntha and could not be seen anywhere else.

The area was full of karpaga virukshas. The gem set mandapas radiated a dazzling beauty. Vaikuntha was also full of kreeda parvaths i.e. Hills of enjoyment. Vaikuntha was filled with beautiful things which provided entertainment to Sri Vaikuntanatha Perumal and Goddess Mahalaksmi and enabled them to while away their time with happiness. The air in Vaikuntha reverberated with the melodious Warbles of cuckoos and other birds. The steps in Vaikuntha were inset with pearls, corals, rubies and other precious stones. The divya theerthas in Vaikuntha were filled with crystal clear water like the minds of the nithya mukthars. The trees were dripping with honey. The

tanks were filled with lotus flowers and sengani neer flowers (it is a type of lotus) which were as beautiful as the Moon like faces of the damsels in Vaikuntha. Nay they could only be compared to the beautiful eyes of those damsels. What is more the entire area covered with flowers presented a picture of a multicoloured soft scented bed! The sucking of the honey by the bees from the honey filled flowers produced a soft music. The divya ganam of the divya vandu (bees) formed a musical back drop. Vaikuntha was full of udyana vanas which captivated the minds of those who entered the place. The precious stones lying strewn all over looked like a gem carpet. It had numerous pillars inset with precious stones. The vast expanse could easily accommodate all persons residing in nitya vibhooti as well as leela vibhooti. Soft breeze blew (Manda Marutam) wafting with it the gentle smell of full blown lotus flowers, sengani neer flowers, chandan, camphor, etc. This Thirumamani mandapa provided limitless, immeasurable anand i.e. happiness. The muktatma reached this Tirumamani mandapa which is the place where Perumal is seated. As soon as he reached the mandapa, the muktatma bows down to the mandapa and says "Ananda mayaya mandapa rathnaya namaha".

When the muktatma reached Tirumamani mandapa the people there again welcome him, hug him and do atma samarpana to the new entrant. The atmas in that place, have attained sameepya moksha i.e in their appearance they resemble the Bhagavan. They will be constantly chanting samagana and enjoying the great qualities of Perumal. As soon as this new entrant enters the mamandapa, they point out to him the different gunas of Perumal. It is said that Baghavath anubhava is like a big river. The people who are already there point out the different qualities of God which are meant to be enjoyed even as people plant poles in a river as marks of identification to indicate the depth of the river! They are constantly chanting the Ashtakshara mantra i.e. Om Namō Narayanaya Namaha. They are reported to be as happy as Nammalwar was when he sang the pasuram starting with the word "Urugumal nenjam" (hiruvaimozhi). They are steeped deep in the ananda sagara

even as an unfortunate soul gets drowned in the pralaya kala samudra. The atma reaches the asana where the Perumal is seated. He is surrounded by divya purushas who are the masters of astras and sastras (astra is a word that is used to refer to mantra, Sastras is the word that is used for an ayudham). The God Who is the Creator, the Sustainer and the Destroyer is being worshipped by Visvaksena and others. The muktatma also reaches that place.

This concludes chapter II of Archiradhi gathi.

To now take up Chapter III in Archiradhi gathi. This chapter describes the divine couch viz. Adishesha, Goddess and Lord Himself.

The divine couch viz. Adishesha looks snow white. The author says that the body of Adishesha is silver white as if thousands of Moon have been melted while creating Adishesha. He radiates a cool calm air. He is full of kalyana gunas. He is prepared to do all types of kinkarya i.e. service to God and thus sets an example to all kinkarya parars. He is known as Anantha, Seshha, as also Thiruvananthalwan. He has numerous heads only so that he could enjoy Bhagavan to a great extent. He is soft and provides a scented bed to Bhagavan.

The divine couch looks like a silver hill The precious stones on the hoods radiates a glow which is equal to the glow of a thousand Suns. In that background is seen Goddess Mahalakshmi. Her beautiful scented hair puts to shame even scent itself. Her eyes are so beautiful that the eyes of Pundarikaksha i.e. Perumal even, occupies only a secondary place. She radiates the beauty of balyam and yowanam. She is so tender and sensitive that if one were to utter a word, the sound would affect the colour of Her body. Such is her sowkumaryam! She offers Her bogayam without any reservation to Perumal so much so Her bogadasai is said to make the viswaroopa of Perumal look insignificant by comparison. She allots works to the various kinkaryadaras. She is the eternal support to all the atmas. She is equal only to God in Her actions and seelaroopa gunas. Seela guna refers to sowseelyam i.e. the great quality of being easily approachable

and move freely with all levels of people. Roopa guna refers to beauty. Gunas refer to all other qualities. This vision of beauty is seen seated on the right hand side of Perumal.

On the left hand side are seated Bhoodevi and Neeladevi. Bhoodevi has even greater patience and tolerance than Sridevi. She is beautiful beyond description. The three thayars look like three streaks of lightning stalks for the fully blossomed lotus flower viz. Perumal. He looks like a dark rain bearing cloud on the top of the silver hill. His dark hue, virtually overshadows the white silver hill i.e. adisesha.

His Thiru abishekam i.e. Thirumudi (hair) presents a crown like appearance. It is as if the Thirumukha mandalam i.e. the forehead has extended its shining brightness upwards and thus establishing beyond doubt that this Perumal is the Master of the ubhaya vibhooti i.e. leela vibhooti as well as nithya vibhooti (Paramapada Pradanam). The beauty of the hair, rising up like a crown, the author says, stymies the beauty of all the other beautiful things in the world. The eyes and the minds of those who look at His curly hair themselves become dizzy. When the gentle breeze wafts, the forelock tantalisingly covers and partly reveals the Thiru namam (caste mark on the forehead of Perumal). The author describes this further by saying that the forehead of Perumal is like ashtami chandra i.e. eight day moon. The wafting lock of hair on the forehead is like a amrutha Dhara i.e. a streak of amrutha (honey). His hair smells of tulasi - basil leaves. The hair on His head looks as if it is a bunch of "karuvaere" (This karuvaere is a scented root). The author compares the crown like positioning of the hair to the bunch of scented kuru roots!

Passing on to the description of the forehead, the author says, that all those who look at the forehead are consumed by an eternal desire to continue to be looking at that forehead and nothing else! They get lost in admiring that beauty.

He then describes the beauty of the eye brows. He compares it to the sarngam bow held by Perumal. This bow like eye brow is said to be keeping under control the two eyes which

look like two lotus flowers. The two eye balls look like two beetles. In brief, the author says while the eye is the lotus, eye ball is the beetle and the eye brow is bow shaped and keeps under control the eyes! the eyes shower an affectionate kindness i.e., vatsalya on the devotees. Those who look at the eyes are devoured by the desire to be continuously looking at it. To see those eyes even once creates an unquenchable thirst to be eternally looking at them. Not to see them causes unbearable pangs of separation! those are the eyes which are all the time looking at Mahalakshmi. It controls the Aishwarya of the ubhaya vibhootis. The vedas say that He is "pathin visvaya". But when one sees Him, one does not have to read the vedas, to realise that He is the Lokanatha and Jagatrakshaka. A mere look at the Perumal confirms beyond doubt that He is the master of the entire world i.e. sootradhari. It becomes evident that the Aravindhalochana (lotus eyed) is Sarveswara (Supreme). Those whose mind has enjoyed the beauty of His eyes will not ever like to look at any other beautiful object. The beautiful eyes act as a compelling magnet and makes the devotees stay near him for ever. Its compelling beauty effortlessly commands all the worlds (Tripath vibhootis). It radiates a calmness. It is dark like the beautiful eyes of Azhagiya Manavalan of Srirangam. To quote Thiruppan Alvar, the eyes are

சரியவாகிப் புடை பரந்து மிளிர்ந்து செவ்வரி

யோடி நீண்டவப்

பெரிய வாய சுண்களென்னைப் பேதமை

செய்தனவே

Literally translated this means that His eyes are dark in colour. They are wide and broad. The eye lashes are beautiful. The beautiful red veins in the eyes can also be seen. The eyes are like gamboling fishes (Matsya dwandhvam). They are eloquent speaking eyes.

The Perumal has a fine chiseled nose. One wonders whether it is a tender a karpaga tendril or is it freshly emerged tender leaf of a karpaka creeper? it has a delicate beauty and is pointed and long. The divine cheeks (divya kannagal) are tender and look like a bunch of tender karpaga leaves (thalir kotuthu).

While each part of the face is captivatingly beautiful, the serene beautiful smile playing on His lips (Manda smitham) enslaves us. It is like a freshly blossomed scented flower (Nava kusumam) queening it in the midst of a bunch of tender leaves. The smile (manda hasam) makes the face shine and glow as if the full moon has lent all its effulgent brightness to the face. In brief, the enigmatic smile enhances the beauty of the face of the Lord (an enigma shrouded in mystery).

The coral like red mouth makes it difficult for us to concentrate on His honey- sweet words (kalva vanchaga varthai i.e., sweet words like what Lord Krishna spoke to Gopikas and made them follow Him like lambs). But the great Lord with the honey- sweet words uttered by His lips is able to way lay our wandering thoughts even as a ship is way laid in the midst of an ocean, He turns our thoughts towards Him and grants us Supreme Bliss. In brief, the author says that the Divine lips is the home for the beautiful "kalva mozhi" i.e., sweet enchanting words which captivate our mind and make us His humble subjects.

The makara kundala i.e., ear drops which adorns His ears is studded with precious stones. When He moves His head, they create a gentle musical sound. What is more the bright shining glow of the precious stones in the kundala get deflected by the frontiers of the ashta disas (eight directions) and rebounds on the face of Perumal and enhances His Tejas. It is as if the makara kundalas are dancing with joy at the sight of the lavanya sundaram (Supreme delicate beauty) of the divine face.

The face (mukham) of Perumal radiates Tejas (bright effulgence), Saithyam (cool), Mardavam (softness), sowrabhyam (delicate fragrance). It has all the great qualities (sakala kalai-gal). It confers happiness on all; It is so beautiful as to surpass even the ravishing beauty of the blemishless chandramandala and that of a freshly blossomed lotus flower. It makes the devotees who are near Him become uncontrollably mad with a craving to attain Him (pichhu uttri). It is the abode of Maya and makes the devotee forget everything else and think of only one wish viz., to attain His lotus feet and become one with Him.

His neck is like a beautiful conch (shanku). The jewels worn on their hands by the Nachiars (goddesses) have left a delicate imprint on His neck. Besides the sevi poo and karna bhooshanam (i.e. the ornaments worn by Nachiyars on the top part of the ear and ear lobes) and gentle blowing of their hair on His neck add to His beauty (i.e., this is a description of the Perumal's beauty enhanced by the embrace of Thayar - Bhoga kala description).

The strong, majestic shoulders look like Maragatha (emerald) hills. The four shoulders look like karpaga vrikshas (trees) whose flowers are the astras (pancha ayudhams) which God holds in His hands. While we live in this samsara we are beset with innumereable fears. God ensures that we are rid of these fears by holding us within the ambit of those protective arms. The shoulders are like the boundary lines which delineate the safety zone which is the haven of security for His sincere devotees.

His chest is the anthapuram i.e. cosy inner palace for Mahalakshmi. Though She is residing there for ever (nitya anubhavam) yet She is so fond of Her place there that She says that not even for a moment will She ever be away from Her chosen seat of residence (agala killane iraiyam enru alarmel mangai urai marba). Goddess Mahalakshmi's feet are adorned with sembpanchu kolambu (red flower juice). It is said that those red coloured feet have left some of the colour on Perumal's chest. The kumkum powder worn on the chest by Bhoomi Piratti also has left its mark on God's chest. The Vyjayanthi mala worn by Perumal with its bright golden shine looks like a Hiranya prakaram (golden fortress) for Mahalakshmi who is seated on the chest of Perumal. The various garlands of precious stones, pearls, Sree koustubhamala etc., and add lusture and beauty to the chest. The white sacred thread (yagnopaveetham) worn by the Perumal looks like a streak of lightning especially in the background of His dark-hued body. The colour combination of the white yagnopaveetham with the dark-hued body gives a para bhaga rasavakam i.e., the beauty created by sharp stark contrast as dark hue of God becomes more clear with the admixture of

the silver white thread. What is more the author says that the yagnopaveetham looks like a dam bunding the flood of His beauty.

The nithyas and mukthars are all lost in contemplation of this divine ethereal beauty of His udhara bandham (waist band). His nabhi looks like a whirl pool centre in the over flowing ocean of His beauty (soundarya sagara) so much so the eyes and minds of the devotees get caught in that whirlpool. The nabhi is also like a bud which alternatively opens up and closes thinking the sankhu (conch) is chandra (moon) i.e. heralding night and the azhi (disk) is Soorya i.e. (Sun) heralding day. The slim waist is also compared to the middle part of udukkai drum (a small drum which is held in the middle of the hand and twirled to make jingling noise when the beads tied on a string alternately hit the two sides viz. base of the drum. This is an instrument that is usually used in temple of goddess). The waist where the cloth is tied has the glow and beauty of the orange evening sky when the sun is about to set (sandhya raga ham). That glow gives an illusion as if the waist is a freshly blossomed flower. The orange coloured vastra mixed with the dark beauty of the Perumal again presents the beauty of colour admixture (parabagha rasa).

Perumal's thighs have the majestic beauty of the trunk of a plantain tree. The anklets at the end of the long legs with their gentle protusion present a picture comparable to a lotus stalk having ups and downs with the small thorns in the lotus stalk.

The soles of the feet have criss cross lines which resemble the shankhu, chakra, ankusam, dhwaja (flag), lotus, vajra ayudham etc.

The divine lotus feet are so gentle and soft (mridu) that even the Nachiyars (goddesses) hesitate to touch it lest they should hurt Him. Those divine feet are the repositories of boundless joy to the devotees. It is the sure sole succour for them to ward off the ills of samsara. The feet have an effulgent

beauty as they provide solace and pleasure to the devotees and act as a proven sheet-anchor while being tossed about in this *samsara*.

The toes in the feet also have their own beauty. They are compared with the shining white beauty of the string of foamy waves in an ocean (*lavan_{ra} sagara alaigal*).

The nails (*divya nagangal*) on the toes present a picture as if many moons have arisen on the sky.

Having thus described each part of His beautiful form, the author then describes the beauty of the entire figure as follows:-

(a) His dazzling beauty feels like liquefied diamond;

(b) His beauty was so ravishing that it made the men like the alwars take the garb of women so as to express their love and longings in the *nayika* (heroine) fashion.

(c) His beauty makes people forget about kith and kin and despise their very existence in this world and seek unashamed oneness with *Devadhi devan*. The devotees are consumed so much by that beauty so that the moment they see Him they say "Oh don't desert us. Otherwise we will cry hoarse and shout to the wide world that you let us down (*madal oorudal* (Tamil).

(d) The thirst to feast ones eyes on His beauty is unquenchable.

(e) The moment the eyes light on His form, one is taken in by the dark hued beauty and His cool comforting presence and the devotee is left wondering how he ever existed without feasting His eyes on Him.

(f) His bewitching beauty captivates even the minds and the hearts of *Nithyasuris* and *Parama samyapannas* who are enjoying His company all the time.

(g) He is the Supreme Protector of the entire universe.

(h) He is the repository of all knowledge.

(i) He is the essence of the Upanishads.

(j) He is like gold kept in an emerald container.

(k) He has a golden effulgence.

(l) One get lost in the divya abharanas that adorn Him even as the beauty of those abharanas serve as the back drop for His Tirumeni azhagu i.e. the supreme beauty of His body.

(m) Because of the divine eternal glance of Peria Piratti i.e. Mahalakshmi His beauty enhances manifold.

(n) He is so gentle and sensitive that even the constant glance of Nithyasooris is hard on Him (sowkumaryam).

(o) The numerous jewels that adorn Him act as the encompassing walls to contain the flood of the beauty.

(p) The enchanting beauty of His blue-hued body with golden effulgence makes one wonder whether a mountain of gold has been melted and mixed with the blue waters of the ocean.

(q) Such a vision of indescribable beauty is a source of immeasurable eternal joy and provides all encompassing comfort. His divya kataksha i.e. "His divya kataksha i.e. divine glance is so powerful that within half a second it makes even Nithyasooris and muktatmas become like putty in His hands. His Kataksha varsham i.e. bliss of His" divine glance fills the minds of Nithyasooris and muktatmas with joy and happiness. He controls the nitya and Leela vibhootis seated on His throne. The seven worlds, all the devas, bow down before this Perumal viz. Vaikunthanatha.

FOURTH CHAPTER

Having described the beauty of Vaikuntha and Vaikunthanatha, in this chapter the author describes what transpires in Vaikuntha after the muktatma reaches that place.

On reaching that place and having seen Vaikunthanatha seated on the simhasana this atma bows down before Perumal and says "Samastha Parivaraya Srimathae Narayanaya Namaha" i.e. namaskara to Sriman Narayana and Garuda, Visvaksetna and others staying with Narayana". Then with boundless affection, like a calf which is happy at the reunion with the cow, though it be after a short separation, this atma is profoundly unbearably happy on seeing God. He places his feet on the steps of the simhasana and climbs on to it. Perumal is also equally happy on seeing this atma. The reunion gives mutual happiness like the happiness that is experienced by the sea on sighting the Moon. Similarly Paramatma sees this atma which had been away a long time from Him while living in the world and to make up for all the time lost and troubles undergone by the atma while residing in the world, He seats the atma on His lap even as Rama had welcomed Bharatha by seating him on His lap when Bharatha came to Chitrakoota. Even as Rama embraced Bharatha and Krishna embraced Akrura, Paramatma embraces this atma, holds him close with love and ask him "Who are you?"

The conversation between God and atma is on the following lines:

God: Who are you?

Atma: I was a prince.

God: What did you do all these days?

Atma: I was lost in enjoying the worldly pleasures.

God: What is it that you gained by such activities?

Athma: I earned my way to hell.

God: What have you done now?

Atma: I have come seeking you.

God: Why did you come? What was the reason?

Atma: Oh Lord You are punya i.e. truth. So I sought you.
(Punya refers to a person who takes one to heaven i.e. Pu mamsam Nayathi ithi Punyaha).

God: What did you do when you were in Bhooloka? What are its results?

Atma: I must have done some punya to be blessed as to reach You Now that I have reached you, all my sins will get wiped out.

Bhagavan then consoles this atma and says you have suffered a lot in Bhooloka. What a pity that you wasted your time on earth. Instead of spending your time trying to earn a name and fame which would have earned you a place in Paramapada, you suffered going through a cycle of births and deaths. Instead of enjoying the pleasure and endless happiness in Paramapada, you lost yourself in enjoying the passing sensual pleasures in the world. But then you realised your mistake and yearned to attain Me. The moment that realisation and thought of the ephemeral nature of pleasures of worldly life dawned on you, I decided to help you. I wish I had rushed to your rescue sooner. I could then have lessened your sufferings. I am glad that at long last you, who were struggling in the flood waters of sorrow and were anxiously looking out for a ship to rescue you, got on to the bund and have reached me. Now all your troubles are over. Stay here, and enjoy the company of the good souls. I feel the purpose of my shrushti has been fulfilled only today. What appeared to be lost has been rescued. By your arrival here it is as if Paramapada has got a leader. You have added lustre to this group (goshti) of Nityasooris. You are a nayaka ratnam for them. Thus Vaikunthanatha welcomed with open arms and generous praise this prodigal son. This welcome, the author says, was of the same order as the welcome extended by Maya koothan Perumal to Nammalwar and by Rama to Vibhishna when the latter sought saranam. Vaikunthanatha then allowed the kind glance of His lotus like eyes to rest on this atma and gave him supreme bliss. Pundareekashan's glance also ensured that the mind of that atma does not waver any more. Perumal then handed over this atma to Mahalakshmi. She bestowed on that atma all the aishwaryas of ubhaya vibhooti and felt as happy as Devaki felt on seeing Krishna after He killed Kamsa. Having been blessed by Perumal and Goddess, the atma got down from His lap, stood before Perumal and was lost in admiring the beauty of Perumal, His thirumukham (face) His divine mouth, His beautiful hair etc. Having admired the beauty from the front the atma moved to the side and enjoyed

the beauty from the side. He then went behind Perumal and admired the beauty from rear also i.e. in tamil (pin azhagu). Then felt that the frontal beauty was more enchanting and came back to stand in front of Vaikunthanatha and drink that elixir from the bottomless chalice of divine vision. He then lifted his hands above his head, folded them in veneration to God and went on cricumbulating God all the time singing His praise.

Sri Vaikunthanatha saw this sight. He had a beautiful smile playing on His lips (mandhasmitham). With His sweet voice He asked the atma to come near Him. He showed His divine feet (Thiruvadi) indicating its unfailing support and asked him to spend his time doing kainkaryas along with the other Nithyasooris. The atma thus attained his objective. He sang the praise of God (mangalasanam) and submerged himself in the eternal amrith, true amrith, sole amrith viz. divine presence.

That is the story of the journey of the atma to Paramapada as described by Pillai Lokacharyar in Archiradhi gathi.

Vaikuntha as described by Kurattalwan in Sri Vaikunta Sthavam

This book is in Sanskrit. It has 100 slokas describing Vaikuntha natha, His qualities as also Vaikuntha. In the following paras the meaning of the slokas 41 to 45 alone are given as those are the slokas which describe Paramapada.

SLOKA 41

In this sloka the poet says Paramapada is also known as Nithya vibhoothi and Vaishnava padam. In that place only people who have shed Rajo and Thamo gunas reside. It is also known as Paramakasa. It is dazzling bright full of Tejas. In comparison to its effulgence, Sun as well as Fire look like glow-worms. The place is full of people excelling in suddha satva guna. It is a world which cannot be destroyed. Every minute it reveals a new facet.

SLOKA 42

In this sloka he says Paramapada is a place where even Brahma, the Creator of the worlds and Rudra the Destroyer and the Master of the three worlds Indra and the other devas cannot enter. Sanaka, Sanandana rishis cannot enter Paramapada. There is no place with is better than Paramapada.

SLOKA 43

He says that Paramapada consists of various parts which defy satisfactory description. Even if one were to compare Paramapada with other objects it would amount to a faulty futile exercise as it is incomparable.

SLOKA 44

Here he goes on to say that all the objects which we see in this world are things which change with the passage of time. To illustrate the tree, the creeper and the plants grow. There are different stages in the growth of both animate and inanimate objects. Such changes are not to be seen in Paramapada. Development, deceleration, destruction, etc. are unknown in Paramapada. Of the shadgunas i.e. six gunas viz. asti (existing), jayathe (create), Parinamate (grow), edhadate (flourish). apachiyate (get wasted away), paranashyati (get destroyed completely) with the exception of asti cannot be found in Paramapada. Only things which can be enjoyed permanently are the blessings which are conferred by Paramapada. Those who go to Paramapada never return to this world.

SLOKA 45

Here the author says that only those who are not affected by either sin or punya and those who have got out of the cycle of birth, death and re-birth and who are not going through the stages of childhood, youth and old age and those who have attained parabhakti, paragnanam and parama bhakti and those who have fully understood prapatti dharma (philosophy of salvation) and the mumukshus alone are capable of attaining Paramapada. The others cannot even visualise through their mind the glory of Paramapada. Paramapada is the place where Perumal resides.

The Description of Vaikuntha as found in Sri Vaikuntha Gadhya by Sri Ramanuja

Let us now look Vaikuntha thro' the great Ramanuja's eyes. Vaikuntha gadhya has six sub sections. In the third, the acharya describes the archiradhi path taken by the muktatma to reach Vaikuntha and the glorious beauty of Vaikuntha itself. In the following paragraphs, a faithful account of the description of Vaikuntha and the Lord as found in Sri Vaikuntha gadhya will be given.

Vaikuntha is described as a divya loka i.e. a divine land of bliss. It is said to be beyond the comprehension of even Brahma and other devas. They also cannot describe that place adequately. Brahma has a comprehension which is far above that of the human beings. But even such a great Brahma, the Creator cannot comprehend the bliss of this Paramapada. Not only Brahma, even Shiva and the great souls and other devas cannot comprehend the greatness of Vaikuntha. They cannot comprehend its area i.e. size neither can they comprehend its wealth. The greatness of this land is beyond the comprehension of even Sanaka and other great rishis. It is vast. It is known as Parama vyoma, Paramapada and Paramakasa. It lies far beyond the anda which contains the fourteen worlds. Each anda consists of fourteen lokas seven above and seven below the earth. The anda is covered by avaranas which are water, fire, wind, akasa, ahankara, mahath and avyaktha. Beyond all these lies Vaikuntha which is eternal and does not change at all. It is absolutely clear (prakriti mandala). Nothing is hidden. In Srivaikuntha, kainkarya to the Lord is eternal and continuous. The laws of karma have no bearing in that divya loka. It is full of nityas i.e. eternally free souls who are enjoying the company of Perumal for ever without any interruption. The number of such nityas in Vaikuntha is countless. Their only job is Bhagavath anubhavam i.e. enjoyment of Perumal. They are great persons from whom even the Lord does not like to be separated even for a moment. Devotion and service are their only job.

The wealth of such a land of bliss is then described. It is said that Vaikuntha is "divya avarana sata sahasra vrute" i.e.

it is surrounded by hundreds and thousands of fortifications i.e. avarana. A question may be raised as to why the great God needs avarana i.e. fortifications when He Himself is the sarvarakshaka. Sri Peria Vachan Pillai, the great commentator says that the avaranas are there because of the needless though understandable fear and caution of the great devotees who are residing in Vaikuntha and who want to protect their beloved God from any possible danger! It is similar to the situation when Perialwar sang Pallandu to the great Lord Himself fearing that evil eye may be cast on the divine beauty of Perumal and Goddess Who came to watch the glory of the victorious march of Perialvar himself.

The beauty of Vaikuntha is then described. The place is full of rows of beautiful kalpaka trees i.e. "divya kalpakatarupesobhite". The central area where the Lord is seated is surrounded by innumerable gardens which are the playground for Vaikunthanatha and His consorts. It is very vast (athipramane). It is very vast in expanse. In such a residence resides the Perumal. The hall of audience of Perumal is studded with different varieties of gems (vichitra ratnamaye). It is a special hall i.e. (divya sthana mantape). It is bright and effulgent with innumerable pillars of precious stones (divya rathna sthamba sata sahasra katibhiroopa sobhite). The floor is paved with varieties of precious gems (divya nanarathna kruta sthala vichitrite). It is having numerous embroidered vithanams, canopies, merkattis, etc. (i.e. divya alankara alankrute).

Having described the hall of audience, Ramanuja then describes the gardens which are surrounding that hall of audience. It is full of multi coloured sweet smelling flowers - flowers which have fallen from the trees, flowers which are still falling from the trees and flowers which are still remaining on the trees. They are of different colours and sweet fragrance (nana ghanda varnaih). The flowers which decorate the place are described as divya pushpa. Thus, the souls which live there are divya purushas, the alankaram is divya alankaram, the pillars there are divya rathna sthambas, divya pushpams are there, everything about it is divya. The gardens consist of trees like parijatha, Harichandana, kalpaka. The gardens have a large number of

resting places i.e. mandapas which are again decorated with flower seats, precious stones which are wonderful to look at, and are places fit to enjoy and are used constantly by the residents there. There are a number of sporting hills. Some gardens are exclusively reserved for the Lord. Some for the consorts of the Lord. While some are for the other residents of Vaikuntha. All the gardens are full of beautiful and sweet singing birds like parrots, cuckoos, white swans and colourful peacocks. The tanks, ponds and the lakes surrounding the divya mandapa are also beautiful. The steps leading to those water resources are studded with pearls, corals and other gems. The water in these tanks and lakes are almost like amruth (i.e. divyamala amruth rasodakaihi).

In that divya mandapa, the God is seated on Adisesha. That flower bedecked mandapa gives great bliss. It is absolutely comfortable (nirasta athisaya anandaika rasataya cha). It is limitless. It is filled with divine music by the humming of the bees which are happily sucking the honey from the variety of flowers. The gentle breeze which blows in that place is intoxicating with the fragrance gathered from chandan, ahil, karpooora and other divine flowers. In such a breathtakingly beautiful environment, the Lord is seated on His divine seat viz. Anantha.

Ramanuja then describes the Lord's consorts and attendants serving Him. He says that to that divya loka Mahalakshmi adds Her brilliance. Her very presence illuminates and gladdens all the residents of Vaikuntha. She commands Adisesha, Vishvaksena and others residing in Vaikuntha to render such services to the Lord as circumstances require. She is a befitting match to Perumal with all Her qualities and beauty.

Ramanuja then describes the Lord, His various aspects, the jewels that He is wearing etc. The Lord has two wide eyes which look like a freshly blossomed lotus flowers. He resembles the clear blue cloud (swacha nila jeemuta sankasam). He is resplendent wearing the pitambaram (atyujwala pitavasam). He is blemishless (athi nirmalya). He is effulgent (swaya prabhaya). He is very cool (athi seethalaya). He is young and delicate (athi

komalaya, nitya yowvanaya). He has the brilliance of a gem. His divine wonderful nature is beyond the comprehension of one's mind. He is an ocean of nectar (achintha divya, arpuda nitya yowana lavanyamaya amrutha sagara). The curls of hair of Perumal are playing on a soft tender forehead which is moist with mild sweat. The beautiful sensitive face of the Perumal reflects its joy on seeing the devotee. The face itself looks tender like a lotus which is about to blossom. His eyes also are like freshly blossomed lotus flowers (ambuja charulochanam). His raised eyebrows look like a tender creeper and it reflects His concern for the devotees. His lips are beautiful and are sporting a bewitching smile (suchi smitham). His cheeks are also tender. His nose is sharp and long (unnasam). His conch like neck is slim. The neck looks more beautiful with the locks of flowing curly hair and His ear drops extending upto His shoulders. His hands are so tender that one can see the impression of the blue lillies worn by Thayar on Her ears, and of Her ear rings and braids of hair caused when Thayar embraced Perumal with happiness for having extended His rakshaka swabhava i.e. umbrella of protection towards Her children (His devotees). The Lord has four arms which look like the branches of a kalpaka vruksha. His hands reach down upto the knees which is the lakshana of a Paramapurusha. His pink palms have beautiful lines (divyarekha alankruta). His fingers are adorned with valuable rings (divya anguliyaka virajitham). His finger nails are also delicate and shining bright (athi komala nakha veli virajitham). His fingers are beautifully long, tender and slim. His Thiruvadi resembles freshly blossomed lotuses. (Tatkshana unmilita pundarika sadrusa charana yugalam). He is wearing a beautiful crown (athi manohara krita makuta). Krita is a crown that a king wears whereas makuta is what is worn at the time of pattabhisheka. The combined use of these two words establishes beyond doubt the supremacy of Perumal. He is the unquestioned ultimate monarch. He is wearing a pendent on the top of the forehead (chuda), a decorative cover for the ears (avatamea) ear drops with the fish motif (makara kundala), a neck band (graiveyaka), rows of chains hanging on the chest (hara), armbands (keyura), a circular band adorning the wrist (kataka), the mole like mark on the chest (Srivatsa). He

has the famous Kousthubha gem on His chest. He wears rows of stringed pearls (mukthadhama). The band worn around the waist (udarabandha), the golden yellow silk cloth (pitambara) and the bands of woven gold threads which is used like a belt on the waist to hold the pitambara, beautiful anklets (nupura) and many other jewels. Each of these jewels by association with Perumal is said to exude sweet fragrance (divya gandhiah). Decorated by these divine ornaments, the God is effulgent and a thing of beauty which is a joy for ever. Besides He is adorned with vyjayanthi vanamala (a garland of unfading flowers). He is holding the panchayudhas viz. the conch, the discus, the mace, the sword and the bow in His hands.

Ramanuja then describes His attendents. First one to be described is Vishvaksena. The entire wealth (aiswarya) of the Lord is entrusted with Vishvaksena who is capable of managing the tasks of creation, protection, destruction of all movable and immoveable objects with his mere thought. He is of great service to Perumal. The other close attendants are Vainatheya i.e. Garuda who is the Lord's vahana. The others are Gajanana, Jayathsena, Harivatra, Kalaprakruti, Kumudaha, Vamanan, Shankakarnan, Sarpanetran, Sumukan, Suprathisthan. All these nityasuris are people who are free from the bondage of samsara unlike the muktas who had gone through the samsara sagara and only later were freed by the Lord's grace. The nityasuris are for ever rendering service to the lotus feet of Bhaghavan and their sustenance and daily food is rendering kainkarya to the Lord. Such nityasuris are countless in number in Vaikuntha.

The look of grace (divya kataksha) of Perumal pleases the entire world. The beautiful words that come out of His mouth add to the beauty of the mouth itself. His speech is characterised by admirable qualities like audibility, clarity, meaning, sweet, grace etc. i.e. (divya ghambirya, oudarya, maduryadi, anavadika guna). His words are full of pleasant ideas which are pleasing to the mind. His words are sweet like nectar and indicate His happiness. Such are the kalyana gunas of Perumal.

Having thus described Vaikuntha and the Perumal and others residing in Vaikuntha, Ramanuja says that this vision has to be remembered every day atleast once so as to sustain oneself. That is why he says

"Tatascha pratyaham atmo jjeevanya evamanusmarathe"

He says that the devotees should be ever eager to realise this bliss and should be itching to be taken into His service. Narayana should be the only goal as He is the only master (mama natham). Our master for generations (mama kula deivatam), our saviour for many generations (mama kuladhanam). He is most enjoyable (mama bhogyam). He is the support and sustenance like one's mother (mama matharam), He is the father (mama pitharam), He is my all (mama sarvam). To see and to think of such a Perumal one should be impatient. One should wonder as to when one would have the blessing of experiencing the lotus feet of the Lord on one's head. One should wonder as to when He would be blessed by the grace of the cool gaze of the Lord's eyes and to be commanded by Him in His sweet friendly and clear words to be of service to Him. Similar feeling of impatience is mentioned in the line in Thiruvaimozhi 8-5-7 when it is said "mugappe koovippani kollai". It means that I request God to call me and use me for doing eternal kainkarya i.e. service to Him. Ramanuja says that one should show desire for eternal service to Lord (i.e. Sarvadesa, Sarvakala, Sarvavasta chita atyanta seshabhavaya). When that offer of service is accepted by God (sweekrutah) the result is removal of all worldly ills (samasta klesa apaham) and conferring absolute supreme happiness and bliss (niruti saya sukhavaham). The result is therefore two fold, one is negative in nature i.e. removal of one's problems, the other is positive i.e. conferment of ananda, bliss. To get this one should offer to do kainkarya (service), God should accept (sweekrutah) and then place His divine lotus feet on the supplicant devotee's head (sirasikrutam). The contact with His feet (Tiruvadi) makes one experience a joy as if one has had a dip in an ocean of nectar (amrith) i.e. amrita sagarantarnimagnah and sarva avayava sukha masita i.e. every inch of ones body experiences the joy and bliss.

To experience and enjoy that bliss one should eternally seek His feet. To conclude let us quote the words of alvar who says "thai nadu kanrae polae, than thuzhaiyan adikkae oye nadi kollum". Translated it means Oh you mortal, you should seek the feet of Bhagavan even as a calf goes seeking its mother, the cow. Only then swamy sambandam gets established when the devotee is swa (property) and Perumal is swamy (the owner of that property). This is again explained clearly when it is said

"Swathwam atmani sanjyatham

Swamithwam brahmani stitham"

i.e. jeevatma has the quality of a thing, a piece of property. Bhagavan has the quality of the owner of that property.

To conclude Ramanuja describes Vaikuntha and Vaikunthanadha and advises the devotee as to what should be the attitude of a supplicant and seeker of moksha. Let us follow the instruction and wake into that heaven.

Vaikuntha as Described in Bhagavatham

Let us now see the description of Vaikuntha as given in Bhagavatha. In the Triteyaskanda 15th adyaya, there is a passing brief description of Vaikuntha as related by Maitreya maharishi to Vidhura. The rishi is said to have heard this from Brahma Who had earlier related it to the devas.

Dithi was the daughter of Daksha. Her husband is Maricha. She became pregnant and was carrying for thousand years! During that period the Sun God and other devas are reported to have lost their power and effulgence. The devas got worried. They approached Brahma and asked him to save them from the imminent danger. Brahma then told the devas a story. He said that His manasa putras viz. Sanaka, Sanantha, Sanandanadhi rishis had gone once to Vaikuntha and from them he heard all about Vaikuntha. They said that all the people residing in Vaikuntha look exactly like Lord Narayana. They do not look forward to any special benefits (phala). They only look forward to rendering service to Bhagavan.

In that place Karma swaroopa Satyamurthi, veda purusha i.e. Perumal Himself is busy conferring nothing but good on His sincere devotees.

In that place there is a forest known as Naisreyasam. The trees in the forest can satisfy all one's desires. In that forest all the resplendent, varying beauty of nature that is seen in the different seasons (Vasantharuthu to Sisarathu) can be seen for ever.

The people residing there are all the time singing the praise of Perumal. Even the strong heady scent of the madhavi flowers in Vaikuntha does not, in any way, divert the attention of the devotees residing in that place. They are all the time singing the praise of the multifaceted qualities (gunas) of Bhagavan.

The bees in Vaikuntha drink the honey from the various flowers and sing a delightful song (reenkara). Hearing the song of the bees the birds like cuckoo, chakravaka, crane, dove, swan, parrot etc. maintain absolute silence as they wish to listen only to the Harikatha rendered by the bees!

Looking at Bhagavan in Vaikuntha adorned with His favourite basel garland, the other flowers like Mandara, Marudhani, Neelothpala, Champaka, Punnaga, Nagalinga, Madhura, Parijatha, Thamarai, etc. are envious of the good fortune of the Tulasi flower.

Vaikuntha is full of gold and other precious stones. The divya gruha of Bhagavan is adorned with intricate gold filigree work and has crystal clear walls of spatika. Vaikuntha is made more beautiful with Mahalakshmi's effulgent glory. The delicate feet of Goddess are beautified with the red padarasa. She is fully bedecked with ornaments. She is seen holding a lotus in Her hand. It appears as if she will use the lotus in Her hand to gently collect the gold dust strewn all over. The devotees are waiting to catch atleast a passing glance from Her eyes. The udyanavana of Goddess has got a border line made of precious corals. The water in the rivulets are crystal clear and calm. Mahalakshmi stands in those waters and worships Perumal with Tulasi. Perumal is very pleased with this and Goddess is equally pleased at the

pleasure of Perumal. That mutual pleasure is said to be reflected in the face of Goddess which is again reflected in the crystal clear waters. In brief, it is said that it is Perumal Who has made Goddess more beautiful with His benign glance. Perhaps it is this which is reflected in the words used by the alvars when they said "avan tiruvukkum tiruvagiya selvan".

This in brief is the description given of Vaikuntha in Bhagavatham. This is a passing reference made by Brahma while assuring the Devas that Srīman Narayana would come to their rescue.

Vaikuntha And Vishnu Purana

Vishnu Purana has the following few lines to describe Vaikuntha.

*Vaikuntaethu Parae lokae Sriyah Sardham Jagathpathihi
Asthae Vishuhu Achinthyathma Bhakthairye Bhagavathai Saha".*
It means

In Vaikuntha also known as Paramapada Jagath pitha (Vishnu) who is beyond ones comprehension and Jaganmatha (Mahalakshmi) stay along with devotees (Bhakthas) and sages (Bhagavatas)

Having thus gone through a quick resume of various authoritative descriptions of Vaikuntha, I wish to only conclude with Prayer - Into that Haven of Bliss, My father, let all of us awake.

Om Namo Narayanaya Namaha.

* * *

KSHEERABDHI (MILKY OCEAN)

This is one of the divya desas which is not in this world. It is the place where God is seen lying down in yogic slumber on the Cosmic ocean in His vyuha form. It is also the place from where the vibhava avatars of the Lord manifest as is evident from the words in the purana viz. "Samudrentham visvasambhavam". There is a sloka which says "Esha Narayanah Sriman ksheerarena niketanah naga paryankam utsrija hyagatho mathuram purim". The sloka says that Lord Narayana Who has come to Mathura is none other than Sriyahpathi residing in Ksheerabdhi. To take the avatar as Krishna He got up from His divine couch Adishesha in Ksheerabdhi and came to Mathurapuri.

The Perumal in Ksheerabdhi is known as Ksheerabdhinatha. He is seen in the yogic slumber in the sayana pose lying down on His divine couch Adishesha. He is facing south. The two thayars Mahalakshmi and Bhoodevi are with Him. In Bhagavatam (8-4-18) the Lord Himself told Gajendra, the elephant, that those who worship Ksheerabdhi which is His favourite place of residence would get rid of all their sins.

The Bhagavatam says that the earth is divided into seven dwipas. They are Jambu dwipa, Plaksa dwipa, Salmali dwipa, Kusa dwipa, Krauncha dwipa, Saka dwipa, Pushkara dwipa. Each succeeding dwipa is said to be twice as large as the preceding one and is placed beyond the ocean encircling it. The seven oceans contain salt water (lavana), juice of sugarcane (ikshu), sura (liquor), clarified butter (ghritham), curds (dadhi), milk (ksheera) and pure water (jala). These oceans serve as a moat as it were one for each of the seven dwipas. They are equal in extent to the dwipa enclosed by them and are situated beyond and encircling each of the seven dwipas severally.

The first dwipa is Jambu dwipa which has a width of eight lakh miles and is girdled by an ocean of salt water. Equal in width to Jambu dwipa, beyond the ocean of salt water and twice as large in width i.e. sixteen lakh miles wide is Plaksa dwipa which in its turn is enclosed by an ocean containing the juice of sugarcane and equal in width to the latter. On the other side of

this ocean and twice as large in extent i.e. thirty two lakh miles wide is Salmali dwipa encircled by an ocean of wine as large as the dwipa itself. Immediately after the ocean of wine and twice as large i.e. sixty four lakh miles wide is Kusa dwipa surrounded by an ocean of clarified butter (ghritham) equal in width to Kusa dwipa. On the outer coast of this ocean of clarified butter and twice as large i.e. one hundred and twenty eight lakh miles wide is Krauncha dwipa girded by an ocean of milk equal in width to the latter. Beyond the ocean of milk and twice as large in extent i.e. two hundred and fifty six lakh miles wide is Saka dwipa, enclosed in its turn by an ocean of fluid curds as large as the dwipa itself. On the other side of the ocean of fluid curds and twice as large i.e. five hundred and twelve lakh miles wide is Pushkara dwipa itself encircled by an ocean of pure water equal in width to the latter. Beyond the sea of fresh water there is the land of gold which is twice its extent where no living being dwells. Beyond that is the mountain Loka Loka which is 10,000 yoyanas in height and as many in breadth. The other side of the mountain is enshrouded with perpetual darkness which again is encircled by an egg shell. That is the entire universe in which Ksheerabdhi is one ocean and it is one of the Divyadesas.

As stated earlier, Ksheerabdhi is also the place where the vyuha forms of Perumal emanate. The Pancharatra speaks of the four vyuha roopas.¹ There is no such mention of this vyuha roopa either in the vedas or in the Upanishads. The Pancharatra says that to look after srushti, samhara and samrakshana, Paravasudeva emanated as four forms i.e. vyuha avatars. They are (Vyuha) Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. Sankarshana is Lord Krishna's brother Balarama. Pradyumna is Krishna's son and Aniruddha is Krishna's grandson. It is now proposed to briefly describe the qualities and the form of each of these four vyuha forms.

It is believed that Vyuha Vasudeva is the same as Para Vasudeva. When He is in Vaikuntha, He is known as Para

¹ The description that follows is mentioned in the book "Lakshmi tantra dharma and darshan" (Hindi) by Ashok Kumar Kalia published by Akila Bharatiya Sanskrit Parishat, Lucknow.

Vasudeva and when in Ksheerabdhi, He is known as Vyuha Vasudeva. That is why, Tirumazhisai alvar in his pasuram 768 refers to God first as Eka murthi where he takes into account His paratvam which is seen in Vaikuntha where He is giving darshan to muktatmas and nityatmas.

There He is a shadguna roopi i.e. He is the embodiment of the six qualities of Gnana, Bala, Iswarya, Virya, Shakti and Tejas. He is referred to as a Paripoorna Purusha i.e. a complete supreme being. The same alvar in the same pasuram later on uses the words "Moonru murthi" i.e. three forms. This refers to the Perumal in Ksheerabdhi when He emanates as Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. Thus, there are some who say that in Ksheerabdhi there are three vyuha forms. Others say that there are four vyuha forms by including Vasudeva Himself as one of the vyuha forms.

The shakti for Vasudeva is known as Lakshmi. For the purposes of facilitating dhyana, Vyuha Vasudeva is described in Pancharatra. His color is said to be that of snow. He is effulgent like the Moon. He has a saumya mukha i.e. a beautiful enchanting face. He has four arms. The first right hand is held in the abhaya- hasta pose. The second right hand holds the chakra. The first left hand holds the conch. The other holds the mace, the base of which is resting on the ground. God is wearing a yellow coloured silk cloth i.e. pithambara. His eyes are like lotuses. This description is given in order to enable the devotees to meditate after conceptualising this form in their minds' eye.

The second vyuha form is Sankarshana. He has also six qualities. But only two qualities viz. jnana and bala are prominent. Sankarshana is responsible for samhara. He is also in charge of sastropadesa i.e. spreading the knowledge of sastra. The shakti of Sankarshana is known as Kirthi. To facilitate dhyana His form is described as follows: Sankarshana looks like a sindhoora sikhara i.e. a crimson coloured mountain. He has a beautiful face. He is seen wearing a vastra which has the color of Athasi pushpa (blue in color). He also has four hands. One right hand is in abhaya-hasta . The other right hand is seen

holding the seera i.e. plough. The two left hands are holding the sankha (conch) and musala (pestle). He is Krishna's brother Balarama. Pathanjali says that once upon a time, Sankarshana was also being worshipped as a God and there were temples for Him.

The third vyuha form is Pradyumna. Pradyumna is entrusted with the job of srishti (creation) and sastra pravarthana (promotion of sastras). His shakti is known as Jaya. To facilitate dhyana His form is described as follows. He looks like a streak of lightning in the midst of a dark rainy night. He is said to wear a red coloured silk cloth as His vastra. He is having a makara dhvaja i.e. a flag which has got the figure of a fish on it. As Pradyumna is Manmatha (cupid) his flag naturally has the fish as its emblem. He also has four arms. The first right hand is held in the abhaya pose. The second right hand holds the five arrows (like Manmatha). Of the two left hands one holds the sankha and the other, the bow. Of the shadgunas, Aiswarya and Virya are prominent in this vyuha form.

The fourth vyuha form is Aniruddha. Of the shadgunas, shakti and tejas are prominent in this vyuha form. He is responsible for loka rakshana (sthithi) and sastraarthaphala nirvahana i.e. responsible for the effects that flow out of the implementation of the various sastras. The shakti of Aniruddha is known as Maya. To facilitate dhyana, He is described as follows. He looks like an Anjana mountain i.e. dark in colour. He is also wearing a pitambara vastra. He has broad eyes. He is described as Mruga-lanchana bhooshitha i.e. decorated with moon. He has four arms. Of the two right hands one is held in abhaya pose, the other is wielding a sword. Of the two left hands, one is holding the sankha and the other, shield (kedayam - kunta or cheena).

In brief, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha are in charge of samhara, srishti and sthithi respectively. Sankarshana is the presiding principle over jeeva tatvam, Pradyumna over manas tatvam and Aniruddha over ahankara tatvam. From Aniruddha follow the various avatars taken by God like matsya, kurma, varaha, Narasimha, vamana, etc. The vyuha forms of

Vasudeva are known severally as Kesava, Narayana and Madhava. The vyuha forms of Sankarshana are known as Govinda, Vishnu and Madhusudana. The vyuha forms of Pradyumna are known as Trivikrama, Vamana and Sridhara. The vyuha forms of Aniruddha are known as Hrishikesa, Padmanabha and Damodara.

The Lord Who is seen in His yogic slumber pose lying down on the divine couch Adishesha in Ksheerabdhi is the origin of creation. Andal has beautifully summarised this concept when she uses the words "vellatharavil thuyil amarndha vithinal" i.e. she refers to the God Who is lying down on Adishesha in His yoga nidra pose as the (beeja) i.e. seed. It is from that seed the entire creation has emanated. That is why the vedas, as stated earlier, say Samudreintham visvasambhavam i.e. the ocean is the place from which the world was created.

Srimad Bhagavata, in the third skandha, 8th and 9th chapters refers to the dawn of creation. There it says that when Brahma arose from His navel seated on a lotus, He was perplexed. He wondered as to who he was having his residence in the lotus, where from has this lotus sprung amidst these waters? Where is it based? He tried to explore and went into the depths of the water through the central hollow of the stalk of the lotus, but found no end even after going down very far. In that darkness of ignorance, Brahma is said to have searched for His origin for a long period of time. Finally he was no wiser than before. He continued to sit on the lotus and started meditating - a state of spiritual communion. Finally, the truth dawned in His mind's eye. Brahma's vision of the lord is described in skandha 3 chapter 9 lines 23 to 33 of the Bhagavata. This is the only description that is available of the Lord in Ksheerabdhi. I shall now quote from the English translation of Srimad Bhagavatam by Sri N.Raghunathan.² It says that "Brahma saw the One Lord resting as on a couch, on the long body of Sesa, white as lotus fibre, which lay on the waters of the Deluge, whose darkness was dispelled by the lustre of the gems in the thousand hoods,

² *Srimad Bhagavata translated by Shri N.Raghunathan Vol. I pages 156-157.*

spread umbrellawise. He saw the Lord, Whose body, containing in itself the three worlds effortlessly, was of a size that was proportionate to its unique length and breadth and was adorned with many a rare gem and article of apparel whose beauty it enhanced. It seemed by its splendour to eclipse the glory of an emerald mountain, which wore the evening cloud like a garment, and was capped with golden crests; which was decked with many a garland made of brilliants, cascades, herbage and wild flowers; which had bamboos for arms, and trees for legs. He saw Him display, out of His abundant compassion, His lotus foot with its lovely toes like petals, lit up by the rays of the nails that shone like the moon - that foot which amply fulfilled the wants of suppliants who offered it pure worship. With a smile that banished the world's sorrows, His beaming face, charming with the sparkle of ear-pendants, the warm red of the lips like bimba fruit, the shapely nose and the beautiful eyebrows, welcomed His lovers. His waist, wrapped in raiment tawny as the filaments of the kadamba flower, was girded with a zone, my dear. And on His breast, which bore the Srivatsa mark, lay the priceless pearl necklace that He dearly loves. He seemed like a mighty sandal tree which held all the worlds within itself; with the Brahma for its hidden root, the powerful arms covered with armlets and a host of splendid gems, for the numberless branches loaded with fruit and flower, and the shoulders hugged by the King of the serpents, for the boughs round which serpents coil themselves. And He bore striking resemblance, too, to a mountain which housed all things, stationary and moving, and was hospitable to the great snakes; which was surrounded by water on all sides; which seemed to have, in the thousand crowns (on the hoods of Sesha), numberless golden crests; while the Kausthubha jewel that lay on His breast might have been just delivered up from the bowels of the mountain. From His neck hung the garland of wild flowers, the concrete embodiment of His fame, round which hovered those bees, the Vedas, enhancing its splendour. And by that garland Brahma knew for certain that it was Hari. He seemed beyond the reach of the sun and the moon, of air and fire, and formidable because of His weapons, which lit up the three worlds with their blaze and were ceaselessly whirling around Him (22-31).

Srimad Bhagavata also says that Maha Vishnu lay on His serpent bed, His eyes closed, His activities suspended and Himself absorbed in the blissful self-awareness of Cosmic slumber. He is said to have been lying down in the Cosmic waters in complete absorption in His own supreme state with His powers indrawn just like fire in wood when it is not aflame. That in brief is the yogic slumber pose of Ksheerabdhinatha.

Lord Narayana lying down serene and calm in the cosmic ocean is the supreme being Who has the fourteen worlds as parts of His body - the seven inferior worlds being the parts below the waist and the seven superior being those above the waist. Out of His face came the Brahmana, out of His arms the kshatriya, out of his thighs the vaisya and out of his foot the sudra. The Bhurloka is identified with His waist, the Bhuvarka with His navel, the Svar loka with His heart, the Maharloka with His chest, the Janaloka with the neck, the Tapoloka with the two lips and the Satyaloka with the Head. Atala is His hip, Vitala His thighs, Sutala His knees, Tala tala His shanks, Mahatala His anklets, Rasatala the top of His foot and Pathala the underpath of His feet. Thus He became the worlds. Some identify the lokas in another manner when they say that His foot form the Bhurloka, the navel the Bhuvarka and the head Satyaloka. When He took on the role of the Creator, He became the Viratpurusha i.e. Cosmic Purusha. Out of His mouth emerged Agni, from His palate emerged Varuna, from the nose emerged Aswins, from His eyes the Sun, from His skin the Air, from His ear the Dik deities (the devas of directions), from His mind emerged the Moon. Thus Lord Narayana is the abode for all animate and inanimate things and He is the ~~one~~ Who abides in all. This is the Jagatkarana and Jagadrakshaka roles, all in one lying down in yogic sleep in Ksheerabdhi.

While describing this great Lord Narayana, it is said that the Kausthubha gem which Narayana wears is the pure soul of the world uncontaminated and divested of all qualities, the Srivatsa mark is the Prakruti. Intellect exists in the shape of His mace. The Lord holds in the two folded hands the divisions of egotism viz. elements and organs of sense in the shape of the conch (shell) and His bow. He holds in His hand the discus

which is the strength of all and excels the wind in its speed flight. The Vijayanthi which He wears contains five precious gems viz. pearl, rubi, emerald, sapphire and diamond. They represent the five elemental rudiments. The holy wisdom is the sword of Achyuta which is sometimes concealed in the scabbard of ignorance. In this manner, soul, nature, intellect, egotism, the elements, the mind, the senses, ignorance, wisdom are all assembled in the person of Hrishikesa. The various qualities of Lord Vishnu have also been dealt with in some detail in chapter 1 of Volume I of this series. Readers may refer to that also.

It is now proposed to refer briefly to the description of Ksheerabdhi and Ksheerabdhinatha as pictured by the Alvars.

Perialvar addresses the Lord (pasuram 350) as "Parkadal vanna" i.e. Lord of the color of Ksheerabdhi. In another pasuram (427), he refers to the Lord as "Parama sashi" who in His yogic sleep is lying down on the divine couch Adisesha. In Pasuram 439 he says that he is devoured by the desire to see the Lord lying down in yoga nidra pose on Adisesha in the milky ocean. He adds that such an all consuming desire is to see Him in Parkadal has affected him so much that he is not able to utter any words and that he is not even able to sleep. He asks the Lord Himself to tell him the means to reach Him.

Andal does mangalasaana to the milky ocean itself from which Mahalakshmi emanated by using the words "Vanga kadal kadaindha Madhavanai, Kesavanai". The word "Madhava" specifically refers to God along with Lakshmi. In another pasuram (516) Andal uses the word "Undu neer urai kol ari" while referring to Ksheerabdhi i.e. she says it is a deep ocean and that God is like a lion. In pasuram 551 she says that the waves in the cosmic ocean on which the Lord is reposing are disturbed (pongiya parkadal palli kolvane). The commentators say that the ocean is disturbed usually on the full moon and new moon days. Here in Thirupparkadal the ocean is exposed to the ten toe-nails of Perumal which look like ten moons. Is it then a wonder that Andal refers to the milky ocean as disturbed?

Kulasekhara alvar refers to the Ksheerabdhinathan as "Kadal kidandhavan" i.e. one Who is lying down on the Cosmic ocean (pasuram 665). In pasuram 680 the same alvar says that Thirupparkadal on which Mayon i.e. the supreme being is resting is full of corals (Pavala velai ulavuthan parkadal kan thuyilum Mayon).

Thirumazhisai alvar had referred to Ksheerabdhinatha as Moonru murthi. This concept of three forms which refers to the vyuha forms of Perumal lying down in Ksheerabdhi has been explained even earlier. In another pasuram (832) he uses the words "Kadaindha parkadal kidandhu" i.e. This Lord who is lying down on the milky ocean which was churned. Thus, by referring to the churning of the milky ocean, the alvar touches upon the vibhava avatars which manifest from Parkadal. By using the word "kidanthan" i.e. lying down, he is referring to the vyuha emanation.

Nammalvar in pasuram 2556 says that the Perumal Who is lying down in Thirupparkadal in yogic sleep is the one Who is the embodiment of the vedas, Who is worshipped by the devas Who during pralaya had swallowed the worlds and kept them safe in His stomach. He is the supreme. He is the one Who measured the world with His feet. That God, he says, is cool and calm and those who worship that Ksheerabdhinatha are better than those Who reside in Paramapada. In another pasuram (2618) Nammalvar again waxes eloquent about the beauty of Ksheerabdhinatha. He says that even if one were to hear about the beauty of the blue hued Perumal lying down in vyuha form in Thirupparkadal on the white Adisesha, the mind gets enchanted, the legs tremble with emotion and the eyes swim. In brief, he says that one gets over-powered even to hear about the beauty of Ksheerabdhinatha. The alvar's description of a dark coloured Perumal in the background of a white milky ocean by utilising the colour contrast is said to reflect parabhagha shoba. In pasuram 2661 Nammalvar uses the words "Iraikkum kadal kidandha enthai" i.e. he refers to the God Who is lying in yogic pose on the noisy ocean with its waves lashing. Perhaps the alvar wonders how with so much of disturbance around Him, the Lord could remain calm and sleepy. Nammalvar further adds that

other than the Lord of Ksheerabdhi, he has no other relations and that his atma is only guided by the words of assurance uttered by the same God. Here the Alvar refers to the words "ma suchah" uttered by the Lord during His Krishna and Rama avatars when He assured people that those who seek refuge at His lotus feet will be protected by Him. The alvar therefore says that Ksheerabdhinatha is his sole succour both for his body and for his atma. In yet another pasuram (2804) Nammalvar again refers to the Lord resting on the five headed Adishesha. He uses the words "Aindhu painthalai yadiravanai mevi parkadal yoga nidrai sindhai seidha enthai". It is usually said that Thiruvananthalvan is the ideal couch for repose. He is referred to as Panchasayanam as He has all the five qualities which a comfortable bed should have viz. menmai (softness), venmai (whiteness), kulirchchi (coolness), parimalam (scent), visalam (breadth and comfort). The alvar also says that the five heads of Adishesha are dancing in joy because Paramathma is lying down on him. But the alvar refers to the God as sindhai seidha enthai i.e. the Lord Who is lost in thought. It is said that in Ksheerabdhi the predominant quality of the God is His role as Jagadrakshaka and whenever any of His devotees calls Him, He is ever ready to start from Ksheerabdhi and rush to their rescue.

In brief all the alvars refer to Ksheerabdhinatha as Paraman i.e. Paramapurusha.

Divya kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar in his "108 Tirupati Andaadhi" says that people will be able to get rid of the sins of the cycle of birth and death provided they seek solace at the feet of the Bhagavathars who have attained the lotus feet of the Perumal Who is lying down in Thirupparkadal divya desa. He says the milky ocean is resounding with the noise of the lashing waves and is full of precious pearls. The Divya kavi here expounds the theory of seeking the feet of the bhagavathas who have attained the Lord i.e. adiyar's adiyar philosophy.

There is one well-known story connected with Ksheerabdhi That is the incident of amrutha mathanam (churning of the milky ocean). In the Vishnu purana this story of the churning of the milky ocean is related by Parasara to Maithreya rishi. This story

is too well known to be dealt with in detail. Moreover, while dealing with the chapter on Mahalakshmi in Volume II in this series, this incident has been dealt with in detail. However, a brief account shall be given in this volume also so as to make this chapter on Ksheerabdhī complete. It is said that once Durvasa rishi got angry when Lord Indra did not show sufficient respect to the garland given by the rishi in as much as Indra put that garland on the head of Iravatham, his elephant the elephant pushed the garland down and trampled upon it. Durvasa then cursed Indra and the other devas. The devaloka is said to have lost its glory because of this curse. Sattvaguna declined, bad qualities like jealousy (lobha), krodha (anger), injustice (adharma) took the upper hand. The asuras started chasing the devas out of their land. The devas approached Brahma who took them to Thirupparkadal. The Lord then appeared before them and advised them to go back to their kingdoms and enter into an agreement with the asuras to churn Thirupparkadal. He asked them to put into the ocean the rare medicinal herbs. He advised them to use the Manthara mountain as the churning rod and Vasuki the snake as the churning rope. He assured them that "amrith" would come out of the churning of the milky ocean and that devas could drink that ambrosia and be blessed with immortality. Accordingly the medicinal herbs were deposited in the milky ocean. The Manthara mountain was used as the churning rod. Midway through the Manthara mountain started sinking. Perumal then took the form of a kurma i.e. tortoise and held the Manthara mountain up on His back. It is said that even while the mountain was being thus used for churning, its rotation on the back of the Perumal did not cause any pain to Him. It looked as if the back was being scratched! The asuras held the head of Vasuki while the devas held the tail. As Vasuki the naga was letting out the "visha jwalas" the asuras felt the strain more than the devas. First came up the Halahala poison, which was swallowed by Lord Shiva. In due course, Varuni (liquor) and Kamadhenu, the celestial cow, the giver of all boons emerged from the milky ocean. Kalpak vruksha and Moon, came then. They were followed by Uchchaisravas and Airavatha the white horse and elephant, which were taken by Indra. Then emerged Dhanvantari, an amsa of Baghavan. He was wearing white clothes and holding a pot filled with amrith.

Finally emerged Mahalakshmi in Her effulgent glory sitting on the lotus holding lotuses in Her hands. It is said that the rishis and the devas then sang Sri Suktham and praised Mahalakshmi. They were competing with each other to catch atleast a passing glance of Mahalakshmi's eyes as that would assure prosperity to them. The asuras wanted to grab the amritha kalasam from Dhanvantari. Narayana then took the form of Mohini and asked the devas and asuras to sit in a row. He mesmerised the asuras with His beauty and distributed the amrith in such a fashion that only the devas received it! Thus, the devas were blessed with longevity and power. They regained their kingdom after defeating the asuras. Thirupparkadal was thus the repository of not only pearls and corals as stated by the Alvars but various precious things like Kamadhenu and the most precious of all viz. Mahalakshmi Herself.

Here we may slightly digress and mention about the incarnation of Mahalakshmi in different Manvanthara. The first manvanthara is known as Swayambhuva Manvanthara. Mahalakshmi was born as the daughter of Brighu maharishi and She was known as Bharghavi. The second manvanthara is known as Swarochisa manvanthara when Mahalakshmi was born in Agni. The third manvanthara is known as Owthama manvanthara when Mahalakshmi was born in waters (jalam). The fourth manvanthara is known as Tamasa manvanthara when Mahalakshmi was born in Bhoomi (earth). The fifth manvanthara is known as Raivatha manvanthara when Mahalakshmi was born in the Bilva tree. The sixth manvanthara is known as Chakshusha manvanthara when Mahalakshmi was born in a lotus (senthamarai). The seventh manvanthara is known as Vaivasvatha manvanthara which is the present age. In this Manvanthara Mahalakshmi emerged from Ksheerabdhi. (Lakshmi Ksheera Samudra raja tanayam).

In conclusion, it is proposed to quote the Rudra Gita. This Gita is a hymn of praise taught by Shiva to Prachetases when they approached Him to be blessed with good progeny. This Rudra Gita appears in Skandha 4, chapter 24 of Srimad Bhagavata. It is the hymn of praise rendered by Lord Shiva on Narayana. With a very loving heart, Shiva, Who was wholly devoted to Narayana,

spoke thus to those Prachetases standing before him with hands joined in salutation. Sri Rudra said: O Lord! Victory unto Thee! Thy supremacy is for the exaltation of the great knowers of the Atman! May good befall me! Though art the ever Self-fulfilled. Salutations to Thee who bearest the cosmic Lotus in Thy navel, to Thee who art the controller of all the evoluters of Prakriti latent in that lotus. Salutations to Thee, manifest as Vasudeva, the peaceful, the unperturbed, the self-effulgent, and the Lord of Chitta (mental stuff). Salutations to Thee as Sankarshana - the master of the category of Ahamkara of the I sense, whose nature is subtle and infinite and who consumes the worlds. Salutations to Thee as Pradyumna, controller of the intellect, the bestower of consciousness on all beings and the inner ruler. Salutations to Thee manifest as Aniruddha, the controller of Manas (mind), which regulates the senses. Salutations also to Thee manifest as the sun, whose glorious light spreads everywhere and who is ever the same. Salutations to Thee, the gateway to heaven and to salvation, the eternal resident of the pure heart. Salutations to Thee in the form of fire - accomplisher of the rite of Chaturhotra and the support of all Yajnas. Salutations to Thee who assumest the form of the food of the Pitris and the Devas, who protects the Devas, and who art the Soma juice which forms the essence of Yajnas. Thou art the essence of water which satisfies the thirst of creatures and keeps them happy and contented. Salutations to Thee who art of the nature of Earth, who art the bodies of all beings, and who abidest as the Cosmic Body. Salutations again to Thee who art the air that holds sway over the whole universe and who art the vitality that supports the minds, the senses and the bodies of all. Salutations to Thee who art the support of the conceptions of within and without, and who, as the ether, dost manifest sound, by which objects have come to be denoted. Salutations again to Thee who art unlimited brilliance and the heavenly region that is attained through great merit. Salutations to Thee who art the meritorious deeds that take one to the worlds of enjoyment and the holy living that leads one to the realms of spiritual glory - to Thee who art also Death and the inflictor of the sufferings which accrue as the result of evil deeds. Salutations to Thee who art the fulfiller of all prayers and the omniscient First Cause. Salutations again to Thee, Krishna, who art illimitable intelligence and the teacher of the

Universal Gospel - to Thee who art also the ancient Being who revealed the Samkhya and the Yoga (the science of the Spirit and the art of spiritual communion). Salutations to Thee who art Rudra, the embodiment of the I sense and the seat of the triune efficiency of action, instrument of action, and action itself. Salutations to Thee who art also Brahma, who is the source of all scriptures and is endowed with the power of knowledge and action. Thou who art the Light of Consciousness that reveals all perceptions! Grant unto us, who are praying for it, the vision of that form of Thine which is dear to all devotees and which is worshipped by all Bhagavatas. Grant unto us a vision of Thee, who hast the blue complexion of a fresh water-laden rain cloud, who art endowed with four well-proportioned arms, and a handsome face; Who hast eyes like lotus petals and attractive eyebrows, nose, teeth, cheeks, face and ears; Whose side-long glances overflow with joy; who hast handsome locks of hair, ear-ornaments and a wearing-cloth yellow in colour like the inside of a lotus flower; who art bedecked with a shining diadem, bracelets, pearl necklaces, anklets, girdles etc. and rendered attractive with hands holding the conch, discus, mace and lotus, besides jewel chain and the like; who hast shoulders powerful like those of a lion and lustrous with various ornaments, a neck beautified with the gem Kaustubha, and a chest with Sri clinging to it, which thereby eclipses the beauty of a polished stone edged with gold. who hast an abdomen broad and indrawn like a banyan leaf and beautified by its three creases and the slight movement caused by breathing; who wears on His comely waist of bluish tinge a bright yellow cloth encircled by a golden waist-band; who hast handsome flanks, thighs, knees and feet; and whose feet resemble an autumnal lotus in beauty and remove the darkness of sin overcasting the mind with the spiritual radiance of its nails. O Teacher of all! Thou art verily the revealer of the path to be trodden by all spiritual aspirants, groping in the darkness of ignorance. To those who aspire for self-purification, meditation on this form offers the means. For those who discharge their duties as offerings unto Thee, their devotion provides them with protection. Only men endowed with supreme devotion can attain Thee - the rarest of all attainments for men, the object of the quest even of inhabitants of heavenly regions, and the supreme goal of all endowed with self-knowledge. After

having worshipped Thee with single-minded devotion, which is very difficult of attainment and rare even among holy men, who would desire any blessing other than the shelter provided by Thy holy feet! Even Yama, who destroys the whole world with a slight but energetic and threatening movement of his brows, considers devotees who have taken shelter at thy feet as beyond his sway; I consider not the attainment of heaven, or even of liberation - not to speak of worldly attainments - as comparable with the blessing of contacting a real devotee of the Lord even for a moment. Therefore, may we have the company of holy men who have attained to purification of their minds and bodies by Thy holy communion - of the mind by hearing about the sin-destroying accounts of Thy excellences, and of the body by bathing in the holy Ganga, which is the ablution of Thy feet. Such holy men are full of love, benevolence and straightforwardness, and there is no place in their heart for any low passion. By the practice of devotion to Thee, the sages attain to a state where the mind is neither drawn to, nor agitated by, external objects; nor is it overcome by dullness and sleep but stays in itself perfectly still and awake. In such a state of mind the sage intuitively perceives the Truth. Thou art that Light of lights, expansive and all-pervading like the sky, the Brahman whose consciousness is the revealer and sustainer of the universe, and whose glory everything in it proclaims. Thou, O Lord, art the free and unaffected Being, although Thy power Maya, giving rise to myriad forms (the multiplicity), creates, preserves and destroys this universe, and leads one to wrongly feel that this multiplicity has an existence apart from Thee. With various rituals and kindred supports, the Yogis worship Thee in several forms of spiritual glory, with faith in the rituals and hope in their success. Only those who understand all these forms to be Thyself can be considered knowers of the Vedas and other scriptures. Prior to creation, Thou alone didst exist, with Maya, Thy creative power, abiding in Thee latent. Then Maya manifested itself as Prakriti, with its constituents of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, and out of these have come all the categories and the worlds formed out of them and all beings, such as the celestials, Rishis and men, inhabiting them. Into the four kinds of bodies created by Thy Sakti, Thou dost enter with an aspect of Thine. A reflection of Thyself in the body is the Jiva, who enjoys the world of objects

with the senses as the bee does the nectar in flowers. Thy presence behind Nature cannot be seen but can be inferred. It is Thou as Time, imperceptible but irresistibly fast in movement, that drivest with terrific speed all manifested beings along their course like a terrific wind blowing away the massed clouds, and ultimately bringest them to their destruction by the interaction of elements. All the creatures of the world, steeped in lust and greed, and engrossed in thoughts on the ways and means of securing their worldly ambitions, are quickly consumed by Thee, the winkless and watchful spirit of Time, as a hungry serpent might swallow a rat that it comes upon. Even Brahma, the supreme teacher of us all, worships Thee, conscious of the limits of his own existence. All the fourteen Manus, the Lords of the world, adore Thee in absolute faith without any intrusion by the questioning of the intellect. Under the circumstances, what intelligent man would forsake Thy feet, knowing that his life has no meaning and is spent in vain if it has not been utilised for Thy worship? O Supreme Lord! The whole world is gripped with the fear of death; but to us who know Thee, Thou art a haven free of fear.

O Princes! Pure in life and performing your Swadharma, you should repeat this prayer hymn. Ever meditating on Him and praising Him, adore Him Who pervades everything and resides in you as the Atman. Hear and repeat this hymn known as 'Yogadesa' again and again with concentration, to the exclusion of all other thoughts. In days of yore, Brahma imparted this hymn to Bhrigu and other offspring of his who were desirous of multiplying the species. All those Prajapatis so commissioned, are engaged in bringing forth various beings, with their ignorance dispelled by the repetition of this Stotra. Those devotees who study this hymn everyday with faith and concentration, will surely attain to the highest goal. Of all the blessings a man can receive, the highest is what is got by spiritual enlightenment. With spiritual enlightenment as the boat, man crosses the limitless ocean of Samsara. Whoever recites with faith and devotion this hymn imparted by me, is able to please Sri Hari, Whom it is difficult to please with other forms of worship. Man attains whatever he seeks from him When He is propitiated with the steady repetition of this hymn

imparted by me. Whoever, getting up early in the morning, hears or recites this hymn with faith and devotion, will be able to break the bonds of all karma. O Princes! Perform Tapas consisting in the concentrated repetition of this hymn addressed to the Paramatma. In the end you will obtain the highest that can be achieved by man". So says Shiva of the omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience of Lord Narayana.

*"Ksheerasaagara-taranga seekarasaara-taarākita-
chaarumoorthaye
Bhogi-bhoga-sayaneeya-saayine Maadhavaaya
Madhuvidvishe Namah".*

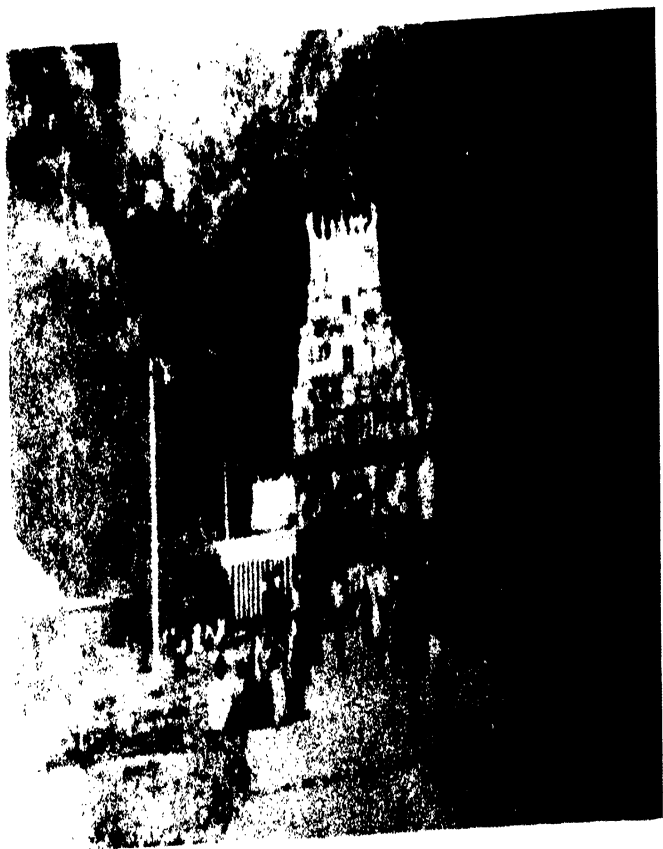
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Western Rajagopuram -- Upper Ahobalam



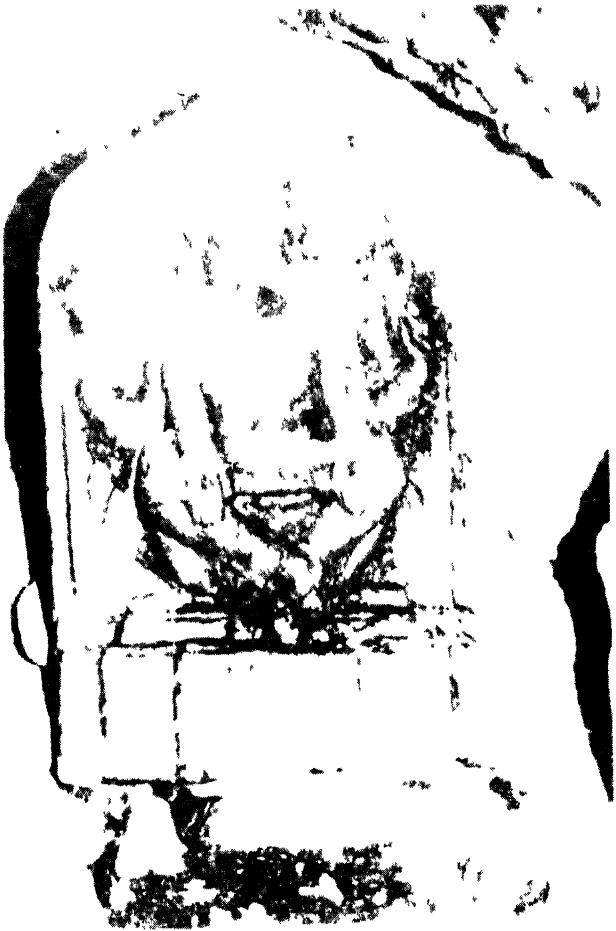
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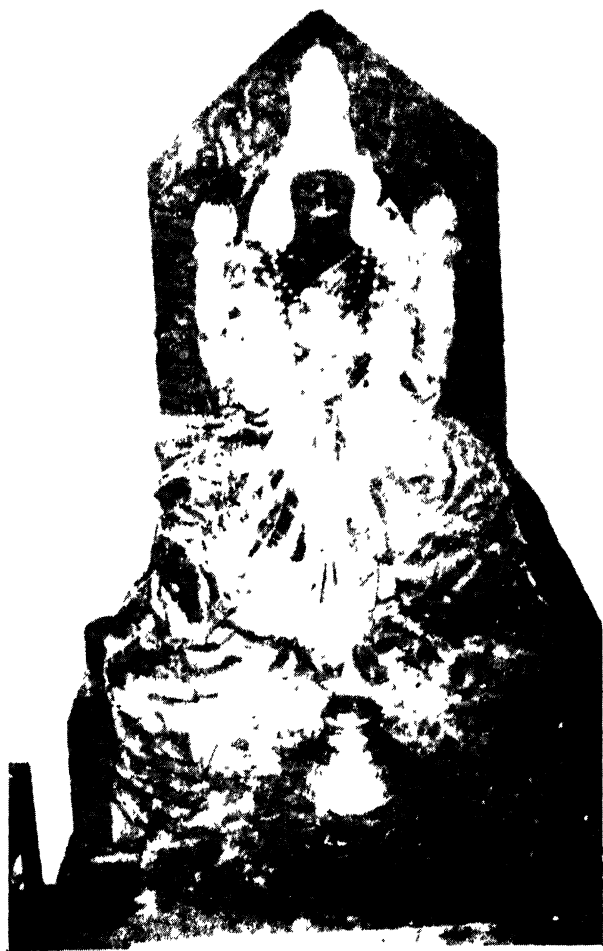
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ஸ்ரீ க்ஷீராபதி நாதர்

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View of Ksheerabdi natha



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She is a B.A. (Hons.) and M.Litt., of Madras University. She entered the Indian Administrative Service in 1958. In the three and half decades in service, she has held various posts from Sub-Collector to Collector, Secretary to Government, in various Departments like Agriculture, Co-Operation, Industries, Social Welfare. She retired as a Principal Commissioner to the Government, in the rank of Chief Secretary. At Present she is a Member of the Syndicate of the Madras University. She is also on the Board of Directors of a few companies.

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